

A FAITH THAT LIVES: AWAKENING AN ACTIVE
FAITH THROUGH INNOVATIVE
TECHNOLOGY

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CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	vi
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	vii
DEDICATION.....	x
EPIGRAPH.....	xi
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER	
1. MINISTRY FOCUS	8
2. BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS.....	29
3. HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS	67
4. THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS.....	94
5. INTERDISCIPLINARY FOUNDATIONS.....	121
6. PROJECT ANALYSIS.....	148
APPENDIX	
A. WEEKLY CHURCH ATTENDANCE AND WEEKLY CHURCH ATTENDANCE BY GENERATION, BARNA GROUP	187
B. PEW RESEARCH DECLINE IN AMERICANS WHO SAY THEY ARE CHRISTIAN	189
C. TIMELINE OF EARLY UNITED STATES HISTORY	191
D. WELCOME EMAIL.....	193
E. WELCOME PACKET	195
F. INFORMED CONSENT FORM	198
G. PRE-PROJECT AND POST-PROJECT SURVEYS	200
H. MID-STUDY INTERVIEWS.....	203

I.	CLOSING INTERVIEWS.....	205
J.	AGES OF STUDY AND SURVEY PARTICIPANTS.....	207
K.	CONNECTEDNESS TO FAITH SURVEY RESULTS	210
	BIBLIOGRAPHY	213

ABSTRACT

A FAITH THAT LIVES: AWAKENING AN ACTIVE FAITH THROUGH INNOVATIVE TECHNOLOGY

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The context of this project is Henrietta United Methodist Church in Henrietta Township, Ohio. There is a lack of connection with young adults, but a need for them to grow in their faith. If the church supports, embraces, and provides new technologies focused on faith development, then those who use them will come to a deeper knowledge of Jesus and more deeply held and meaningful faith practices. The project was conducted over eight weeks. Data collection included surveys, interviews, journals, technology platforms, and evaluations. Through using the technologies and resources offered, participants deepened their knowledge and use of spiritual practices.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge all of those who had a part in this process from the clergy group in Strasburg, Ohio, coordinated by Rev. Jason Rissler. Thank you to the supportive members of Strasburg United Methodist Church who were instrumental in the first stages of this project as ideas were clarified and foundational chapters were written, and to the congregation of Henrietta United Methodist Church where the project was implemented and completed. You have supported me with your prayers, interests, questions, and encouraged me along the way.

The project could not have been completed without the time and effort of the participants. I thank all sixteen of you for your commitment, honesty, and revelations. You took precious time out of your lives to try something new, and I appreciate all the conversations and insights you provided. You each made a difference just by being yourselves and honestly reflecting what real life is like for young adults today.

Thank you to my professional associates, Dr. Perry Crenshaw, Dr. Jamal Mamkhezri, and Dr. Jordan Mamkhezri, for your insights and suggestions, for pushing me to clarify ideas, for research guidance, and for reading documents over and over again as new drafts were created. Your encouragement kept me moving forward, and I appreciate it. My editor, Dr. Lori Spears, and her team brought the document together making suggestions and pointing out corrections needed. Thank you all.

This work could not have been completed without the instruction and support of the Rooted: Church Planting and Church Revitalization in Our Diverse World cohort. Together, we have met the challenges of online intensives, COVID-19 protocols, and various health concerns. We have discussed life in all its many facets and shared deeply from our hearts. You have deepened my knowledge and understanding of God's presence and faithfulness through the sharing of your stories, and I am grateful.

Thank you to my mentors, Dr. Vance Ross, Dr. Rudy Rasmus, and Dr. Lillian Smith, and to our faculty consultant, Dr. Joni Sancken, for creating a safe space for stories to be shared, but also a space that challenged me and pushes me to keep learning and asking questions. My library has increased and diversified due to your suggestions, and I continue to add bookshelves to my home and office. Thank you for encouraging me through what became a difficult journey and for your prayers, calls, and encouragement as I faced my cancer diagnosis and treatments.

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In all honesty, I do not believe I would have completed this study without the love and encouragement of the rest of the Fab Five: Dr. Yvette Richards, Dr. Marcus Dudley, Dr. Adebowale (Debo) Onabanjo, and Doctoral Candidate, Pastor Victor Tate. Calls, texts, Facetime, and Zoom meetings regularly kept us together and built a family. Your caring, encouragement, prayers, support, and honesty have kept me going as have your

stories, jokes, photoshop skills, and laughter. I am blessed to call you family and to have each of you in my life.

I would like to thank my family for their love, strength, and support throughout this process. My children: Jared, Jordan, JennieGlenn, Joan, and Joy; my daughter-in-law and sons-in-law: Ann, Jamal, Kurt, Matthew, and Matthew; and my grandchildren: Lucas, Nora, Alaina, and Evan have provided sounding boards, resources, much-needed study breaks, and play dates as well as listening ears when the challenges seemed too much, and the mountain of work seemed too high. My sisters, Jill Lamison and Janet Younkin, provided love, care, encouragement, and patience as well as understanding when my schedule left me little time for visits with them.

Finally, I must thank my husband, Keith Hoile, who has loved and supported me in everything God has put before us since we met in college. Thank you for being game to be a pastor's husband. Thank you for cooking so much and taking care of me when I was distracted by research, papers, and deadlines. Thank you for drying my tears when it all seemed too much, and I questioned why God called me to this. Most of all, thank you for reminding me how necessary and valuable this research could be and how the Holy Spirit can use it to bless and build lives of faith.

DEDICATION

This work is a product of the urgings of the Holy Spirit to find ways to reach young adults today. I, therefore, dedicate this work to young adults who are finding their way in a demanding world. You face struggles and challenges that other generations have not and are re-shaping what the church will look like in the future. You are loved. You are strong. You are valuable and adored by God. You inspire me every day.

See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the desert and streams in the wasteland

—Is. 43:19, NIV

INTRODUCTION

Since the beginning of Christianity, believers have shared the good news of salvation and hope offered through Jesus. They have baptized new believers; taught them the core values of the faith; and welcomed them into the community of faith. Acts 2:42-47¹ describes the practices of the new believers as they shared their resources, focused on the teachings of the apostles, gave to those in need, and enjoyed meals together. The church² grew and developed throughout the centuries changing and adapting as needed through times of persecution, power, and political maneuvering. As the church expanded into new areas, its practices, liturgy, and organization often adapted to the culture around it, but the central message of Jesus' call to love others and the promise of salvation through his life, death, and resurrection stayed firm.

The history of the United States, even with the separation of church and state, has been influenced and informed by religious beliefs as Christians worked for change in areas of injustice and poverty. There was a time when churches were full on Sunday mornings, and only rarely would anything be scheduled outside of the church which might interfere with church attendance. Times have definitely changed. Currently, many

¹ Biblical citations within this document are from the New Revised Standard Version unless otherwise indicated.

² The term "the church" in this document refers to the Christian religion in general including many denominations and schools of thought. When used, it will be referring to a predominate school of thought or action. It is not meant to imply unanimity.

Christian churches in the United States find themselves struggling with dwindling attendance and a lack of participation from young adults. Studies have shown declines in both membership and attendance for various generations in recent years.

In October 2019, the Pew Research Center released the results of a study that showed a decline in church attendance in the United States.

The data shows a wide gap between older Americans (Baby Boomers and members of the Silent Generation) and Millennials in their levels of religious affiliation and attendance . . . Only about one-in-three Millennials say they attend religious services at least once a month. Roughly two-thirds of Millennials (64%) attend worship services a few times a year or less often, including about four-in-ten who say they seldom or never go.³

This data is backed up by Barna Group research as well as Gallup polling. Barna's "State of the Church" report published in 2020 shows a decline in general church attendance as well as in church attendance across generations [Appendix A]. Barna identified the generations as follows: "Gen Z: Born between 1999 and 2015; Millennial: Born between 1984 and 1998; Gen X: Born between 1965 and 1983; Boomer: Born between 1946 and 1964; Elder: Born before 1946."⁴ Gallup made headlines in March 2021 with their article titled, *U.S. Church Membership Falls Below Majority for First Time*. The article explains that:

American's membership in houses of worship continued to decline last year, dropping below 50% for the first time in Gallup's eight-decade trend. In 2020,

³ Pew Research Center, "In U.S., Decline of Religion Continues at Rapid Pace," Pew Research Center, October 17, 2019, <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2019/10/17/in-u-s-decline-of-christianity-continues-at-rapid-pace/>.

⁴ Barna Group, "Signs of Decline and Hope Among Key Metrics of Faith," *Barna: State of the Church Report* (Ventura, CA: Issachar Companies, 2020), <https://www.barna.com/research/changing-state-of-the-church/>.

47% of Americans said they belonged to a church, synagogue or mosque, down from 50% in 2018 and 70% in 1999.⁵

The article also noted that “U.S. church membership was 73% when Gallup first measured it in 1937 and remained near 70% for the next six decades, before beginning a steady decline around the turn of the 21st century.”⁶ Gallup also noted generational differences:

Church membership is strongly correlated with age, as 66% of traditionalists – U.S. adults born before 1946 – belong to a church, compared with 58% of baby boomers, 50% of those in Generation X and 36% of millennials. The limited data Gallup has on church membership among the portion of Generation Z that has reached adulthood are so far showing membership rates similar to those for millennials.⁷

The traditional form of Christian devoutness defined as worship for an hour or more in a church building preceded or followed by a Sunday school program is no longer a high priority for many adults. While reasons for the decline of attendance and prioritization of worship vary, for many, changes in society have brought new demands and opportunities for the use of their time on Sundays. It is still the call of the church, however, to reach out to new generations to make and mature disciples of Jesus Christ, so it is imperative that believers find new ways to reach new generations and inspire them to a life of deeper faith and devotion. While young adults may not be as active in worship and Sunday school as previous generations, for many there is a deep desire to learn and grow in their faith. By insisting that younger generations conform to systems which were established

⁵ Jeffrey M. Jones, “U.S. Church Membership Falls Below Majority for First Time,” Gallup, Inc., <https://news.gallup.com/poll/341963/church-membership-falls-below-majority-first-time.aspx>.

⁶ Jones, “U.S. Church Membership,” <https://news.gallup.com/poll/341963/church-membership-falls-below-majority-first-time.aspx>.

⁷ Jones, “U.S. Church Membership,” <https://news.gallup.com/poll/341963/church-membership-falls-below-majority-first-time.aspx>.

generations ago in a different social structure and culture, the church misses the opportunity to reach people of God who want to be closer to God. It is vital to reach out to young adults where they are and provide opportunities for them to delve into their desire for a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ.

One of the ways to reach young adults is through the innovative use of technology. Young adults are adept at many technology platforms and actively search out new ones. They form communities within the platforms they use and gain intelligence that goes with the platform. As new applications, gaming systems, and other technologies are released, they will often spend a great deal of time and resources gaining expertise and interacting with their friends to share information. The excitement, dedication, and commitment that is shown to new applications and games are similar to the time, dedication, and commitment historically shown by Christians during faith revivals.

If the church will support, embrace, and provide new technologies focused on faith development, then the young adults who use them will come to a deeper knowledge of Jesus, experience more deeply held and meaningful faith practices, and grow in discipleship. As described in chapter six of this document, the research project for this study did just that with many of those involved stating they had a new or renewed interest in the scriptures and in their faith.

Chapter one introduces the community of Henrietta Township in Northeast Ohio. Henrietta United Methodist Church was the context for this study. The chapter gives a history of the church as well as a breakdown and description of the population surrounding the church including their interests and lifestyles. It also includes my background and what brought me to this area of study.

Chapter two takes a deep look at the conversion experience of a man best known as the Ethiopian Eunuch. Through the work of the Holy Spirit, and the faithfulness of Philip, the Evangelist, the Ethiopian found acceptance and an understanding of the call of Christ. When a person needs God's love and a place of acceptance, the Holy Spirit calls believers to provide a welcoming and understanding space where those seeking can find answers to their questions and experience God's loving embrace. It is a challenge for the church, but also a desperate need for many of God's people not acquainted with the faith.

Chapter three explores The Second Great Awakening in the United States. The new nation was finding its feet - expanding to the west and becoming aware of social justice issues and needs of its citizens that were not being effectively addressed. The challenge to believers of the time was how to reach frontier settlers with the gospel and how to address social justice issues and other needs of the time. Their answers to these challenges produced dynamic ministry, activism, and service to God as well as unapologetic preaching of the Christian faith.

The Holy Spirit was acknowledged as the driving force in the Second Great Awakening; was the key catalyst in the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch; and continues to be at work in the world today calling people to come find answers in God. Chapter four takes a deep look at the presence and power of the Holy Spirit and the importance of the Holy Spirit's work in the ongoing ministry of the church. As the church reaches out to new people and develops disciples, it must understand how people learn and grow. It is obvious that a teenager can understand and do more than a toddler, but when do those changes take place, and how does development continue into adulthood?

Chapter five explores the area of human growth and development and explores various theories including developmental milestones and age-specific needs so that technologies and ministries developed by churches will be age-appropriate and better able to speak to the age group they are trying to reach.

Chapter six analyzes the project and results giving details on the process as well as insights from the participants in their own voices. The project for this research was held in the spring of 2022 and used technology as a means of connecting with young adults and providing them opportunities to learn, grow in Christian practices, and be informed of the ongoing mission of the Spirit Lake Ministry Center in North Dakota. Through the use of a website, email, apps, journaling, and hard copy resources, participants engaged in a period of faith development according to their needs and interests.

Local churches have often been slow to embrace technology, but the impact of the COVID-19 shut down brought many churches to a new awareness and use of technology. Many congregations began livestreaming or posting their worship services online, having meetings and Bible studies via Zoom or other platforms, and/or creating social media pages to keep in touch with members who could no longer come together in person. While this was a start, it is just a drop in the bucket of what is possible. With ever-growing technology development and accessibility, the church has been provided with a resource that allows it to connect and provide resources, encouragement, prayer, and guidance to those in need of its message.

An ever-expanding variety of technology platforms will allow for endless creativity as the church is led by the Holy Spirit into a new dimension of sharing the

faith. Meeting in person will not cease to exist - fellowship and relationships will continue to be a vital part of ministry - but the ministry will be expanded to reach those who are not currently active in traditional ways. Where will the Holy Spirit lead us from here? It is my hope this research will spark new ideas and possibilities for you as you consider what God has done and where God is leading us now.

CHAPTER ONE

MINISTRY FOCUS

Discipleship is a key facet of the ministry of the Christian church. At the end of the Gospel of Matthew, the disciples are empowered and entrusted by Jesus to “go . . . and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.” (Mt. 28:19-20a) Following the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, the disciples began to move forward in this call, preaching, teaching, baptizing, and healing as they moved in and throughout Jerusalem and the surrounding areas and then out into the whole known world. As the movement grew and people began to believe and gather, the Christian church was formed. Throughout the centuries, the church has continued to follow this call and commission from Jesus. Each generation does its part in faithfully teaching, preaching, and baptizing. People of all ages have been told the story of God’s love and salvation from ancient times until the present day. Since its beginning, children, youth, and young adults have been an important part of the church and made many contributions to furthering its ministries.

The world today still has people who need to hear and embrace the call of Christ to come into a relationship with the God of creation who loves and cares for them and

can bring them hope, salvation, and a new life. Many young adults¹ need to hear and understand what Jesus taught. Some young adults need an introduction to the saving grace of Jesus Christ and some already know Christ and believe, but need to deepen their spiritual knowledge, experience Christian formation, and explore active discipleship.

The church's ministry with children, youth, and young adults has been foundational to my own beliefs and faith journey. Through the experiences and lessons taught in the youth group of my home church, I grew in relationship with Jesus, and deepened my faith, eventually discerning a call to ministry. Through over thirty-five years of being active in ministry, I have seen the same happen for others as they encounter the living God and are transformed by the power of God's love and care. When I was being raised, it was common for people to attend church each Sunday. There were few distractions on Sunday mornings, with most of the stores and businesses closed and few or no secular activities scheduled. If parents had the desire, children and youth were brought to worship and, often, to Sunday school to experience the faith. The children and youth could learn the Bible stories, ask questions, and contemplate God during time specifically devoted to forming their faith.

Times have changed. While many churches continue to offer Sunday school classes, attendance is often sporadic as families go from activity to activity with their children. What was once a morning devoted to worship and rest has become an opportunity for groups, businesses, and sports teams to schedule events and games when most families are available. For many of today's parents, the benefits their children gain from playing sports, such as physical activity, strategy, commitment, and teamwork, are

¹ For the purposes of this project, young adults are defined as people ages nineteen to forty.

important values they want their children to experience. They devotedly attend practices and games, which now include Sundays as part of the schedule. When homework and school projects are added to the students' schedules, there is even more time taken. The homework needs to be done to help them acquire knowledge in the curriculum they are studying at school. However, it often takes hours of their time each day and on the weekends. Balancing all the demands and opportunities for children and youth can become overwhelming and unmanageable, with church attendance often being left behind. The result of these realities is often young adults from Christian families who have not grown in their faith, commitment, or discipleship. The church is called to step in and give these young adults tools to create priorities for their lives that honor God, themselves, and others, but how can the church effectively accomplish this if those they are trying to reach are not available when the church comes together to teach and worship or not interested in attending a traditional type of church class?

The context of this project was Henrietta Township, Ohio. The church at the center of the project was Henrietta United Methodist Church, located near Amherst, Ohio, and about one hour from the city of Cleveland. Henrietta United Methodist Church was founded on April 25, 1872. The church met in the local schoolhouse until the decision was made to purchase the land where the church building is now located. The founding families were Swiss immigrants who settled in the area. A record of church history states, "The church . . . was dedicated on September 5, 1875. The dedication services were held in German in the morning and English in the afternoon."² Services continued to be held in German until the early 1900s. In 1925 the congregation changed

² Henrietta United Methodist Church, *Henrietta United Methodist Church Family Favorites Cookbook* (Kearney, NE: Morris Press Cookbooks, 2008), 3.

to English services due to a change in the membership's language preferences. Many of those who immigrated had passed away, and newer generations spoke English rather than German.

As time passed, improvements were made to the church building to modernize the building and provide for the ministry needs of the church.

In 1922, the building was raised and a basement dug to provide space for a kitchen and a Sunday School room... In 1950, an addition was made to the rear of the church for three Sunday School rooms, a new kitchen, nursery and restrooms downstairs, and a new gas furnace.³

Various additional improvements and updates happened in the years since, including renting a modular trailer for use as Sunday school rooms. The Henrietta congregation was served by a circuit pastor based in Vermilion, Ohio, until 1914. "When it was apparent that the Vermilion church would be closed, it was decided that the Henrietta church would build a parsonage and become an independent charge. The present parsonage was purchased from Sears Roebuck as a 'kit house' and was built for about \$4000."⁴ An addition was recently added, which includes a downstairs bathroom, mudroom, laundry room, and an outside deck.

Henrietta Township is a rural farming community and is part of the Firelands School District. According to MissionInsite,⁵ in 2021, the population in a five-mile radius of the church is 10,746 people, which is an increase of 233 since 2010. The population includes 4,145 households, with 3,140 being defined as family households. The ethnic

³ Henrietta United Methodist Church, *Henrietta United Methodist Church Family Favorites Cookbook*, 4.

⁴ Henrietta United Methodist Church, *Henrietta United Methodist Church Family Favorites Cookbook*, 4.

⁵ Experian Marketing Services, "East Ohio Conference Custom Demographics Report for Henrietta United Methodist Church 5 Mile Radius," *MissionInsite*, <http://www.missioninsite.com>.

makeup is predominately White (non-Hispanic), with 10,227 people, representing 95.4% of the population. The next largest ethnic group is Hispanic or Latino, with 318 people or 2.5% of the population. The remainder of reported ethnicities includes Pacific Islander/American Indian/Other (non-Hispanic) at 103, Black/African American (non-Hispanic) at sixty-three, and Asian (non-Hispanic) at thirty-five.

A “Phase of Life” breakdown of the current population shows 228 children from birth to age four, with an expected increase of 384 by 2031. There are 1,200 children ages five through seventeen, with an expectation of 1,303 by 2031. “College/Career Starts” ages eighteen through twenty-four number 1,058 with 667 projected for 2031. There are currently 1,316 people identified as singles and young families ages twenty-five to thirty-four, with a projection of 1,356 in 2031. “Families and Empty Nesters” ages thirty-five to fifty-four number 2,137 with 2,211 projected for 2031. “Enrichment Years Singles/Couples” ages fifty-five to sixty-four have 1,925 people with a projection of 1,232 in 2031. Completing the list are those in the “Retirement Opportunities” category, which includes those aged sixty-five and over with 2,642 people, which is expected to rise to 3,177 in 2031. The average household income in 2010 was \$70,765. By 2021, the average household income had grown to \$84,919. Per capita income is \$32,755, with only 2.6% living below the poverty level.⁶

The Mosaic breakdown of population groups from the MissionInsite report shows groups in the population. The Mosaic breakdown gives a descriptive title to the groups and describes their needs and interests. The most populous group is “I30 – Family Union – Potlucks and the Great Outdoors,” with 24.9% of the population. This group is defined

⁶ Experian Marketing Services, “East Ohio Conference Custom Demographics Report,” Mission Insite, <http://www.missioninsite.com>.

as “comfortably established middle-income couples with children living in suburbia.”⁷

They are described as:

Mostly middle-class families and some empty-nesters living in remote rural communities. The adults have turned high school diplomas and some college education into decent wages from a mix of farm and blue-collar jobs. Their kids are mostly teenagers and young adults, either grown and out of the house or soon to be. Their houses, situated on substantial lots, are large enough to be a bargain at a less-than-average \$200,000. Far from urban centers, the neighborhoods where this segment lives are safe where no one worries about crime or violence.

They enjoy hunting, fishing, and camping, as well as having friends over for casual dinners and game nights.

The next highest population group is “E21 – Thriving Boomers – Unspoiled Splendor” at 16.5%. This group is described as “comfortably established baby boomer couples in town and country communities.”⁸

Over a third of adults [in this group] still work in a blue-collar setting while most hold mid-level jobs in sales and white-collar professions. These baby-boomer couples tend to be high school educated; some attended college. With most of their children grown and out of the house, both parents are typically in the workforce.⁹

Their interests are “traditional hobbies and activities associated with a more relaxed, rural lifestyle.”¹⁰ They enjoy gardening, hunting, and fishing, and camping. “They are concerned about pollution, recycling, or threats to their health, and generally take some actions one might consider ‘green.’ They have deep roots in their communities and care

⁷ Experian Marketing Services, *Experian Mosaic USA E-Handbook* (New York, NY: Experian Information Solutions, Inc., 2019), 75.

⁸ Experian Marketing Services, *Experian Mosaic USA E-Handbook*, 65.

⁹ Experian Marketing Services, *Experian Mosaic USA E-Handbook*, 65.

¹⁰ Experian Marketing Services, *Experian Mosaic USA E-Handbook*, 65.

about their neighbors. Many support a variety of charities, volunteer for different groups, and serve as community leaders.”¹¹

The third highest population group for this area is “J34 – Autumn Years – Suburban Sophisticates” at 13.1%, who are defined as “established sophisticates living comfortable suburban lifestyles.”¹² The description states, “More than four-fifths of household heads are over sixty-five years old, and half are already retired. With their children out of the house, this mix of empty-nesting couples and widowed individuals live comfortably on mid-scale incomes and assets from a lifetime of working at professional and technical jobs.”¹³ They spend time gardening as do some of the other groups and are described as enjoying reading and watching television. They also enjoy “activities sponsored by their religious group or veterans’ club.”¹⁴ The report also makes clear that this group is likely to belong to and support their church, saying, “They care about their faith and go to religious services each week.”¹⁵

Group four in the report is “D15 – Suburban Style – Sport Utility Families,” making up 8.2% of the population. They are described as “upscale middle-aged couples with school-aged children living active family lifestyles in outlying suburbs.”¹⁶ “Most of the adults are middle-aged and often have children of all ages. The segment is characterized by above-average educations and incomes in the low six figures from a mix

¹¹ Experian Marketing Services, *Experian Mosaic USA E-Handbook*, 65.

¹² Experian Marketing Services, *Experian Mosaic USA E-Handbook*, 79.

¹³ Experian Marketing Services, *Experian Mosaic USA E-Handbook*, 79.

¹⁴ Experian Marketing Services, *Experian Mosaic USA E-Handbook*, 79.

¹⁵ Experian Marketing Services, *Experian Mosaic USA E-Handbook*, 79.

¹⁶ Experian Marketing Services, *Experian Mosaic USA E-Handbook*, 59.

of white-collar and blue-collar jobs.”¹⁷ The location of their homes gives them the benefit of rural living with a reasonable commute time to jobs in more urban areas nearby. “In these stable areas, families have deep roots and belong to the PTA, church groups, and unions.”¹⁸ Lives are centered on their children and family activities, including sports, local attractions, and school activities. They also enjoy hunting, fishing, and camping. “They are generous contributors to private, political, and educational charities.”¹⁹

The fifth group is “E20 – Thriving Boomers – No Place Like Home,” with 6.9% of the population defined as “established multi-generational households in suburban areas.”²⁰ The description says, “Many households contain 50-something adults and their 20-something children or aging parents sharing the family home. Segment members are typically educated, and the households contain multiple workers earning good salaries in a mix of white-collar, sales jobs, and blue-collar jobs as well.”²¹ They enjoy and are vested in their communities and enjoy “laid-back lifestyles. The baby boomer adults are content with sedentary pursuits like collecting antiques and catching concerts, movies, and theatre performances.”²² The younger age groups in this category enjoy more active pursuits and entertainment, including camping. “The boomer majority . . . have a matter-of-fact approach to life. They work hard, volunteer with community organizations, and when it comes to charitable giving, they like to spread the wealth around, donating to a

¹⁷ Experian Marketing Services, *Experian Mosaic USA E-Handbook*, 59.

¹⁸ Experian Marketing Services, *Experian Mosaic USA E-Handbook*, 59.

¹⁹ Experian Marketing Services, *Experian Mosaic USA E-Handbook*, 59.

²⁰ Experian Marketing Services, *Experian Mosaic USA E-Handbook*, 64.

²¹ Experian Marketing Services, *Experian Mosaic USA E-Handbook*, 64.

²² Experian Marketing Services, *Experian Mosaic USA E-Handbook*, 64.

wide range of causes, especially religious and environmental programs, education, and the arts.”²³ Thirty-two other groups are included in the report, but all are under 5%, with some only reporting one member in the area’s population.

Henrietta United Methodist Church currently has 151 members on the rolls, with an average of eighty-seven attending worship on Sunday mornings and 125 attending online services during the COVID-19 pandemic.²⁴ The church follows a one-board model of leadership, and those serving take their roles seriously, making sure that tasks and ministries are done efficiently and well and looking ahead to what will be needed in the future. The church’s budget is stable and is supported by member giving, online giving, endowments, and the sale of pumpkin rolls as well as a booth at the county fair. The congregation meets their shared giving goals each year and gives beyond what is required to conference ministries and special offerings.

The church has a Blessing Box in the parking lot, which has non-perishable food available at any time for anyone in the community to take and use. They support a middle school, Mid-High Mayhem youth ministry, which includes not only students in the congregation but also students in the school district. Vacation Bible school is held each summer, and in 2021 was attended by twenty-five students. Teenage and adult volunteers made it a successful, enthusiastic, and fun week. Adults volunteer for the “SHINE” reading program in the local elementary school. Volunteers spend time each week during the school year reading with first-grade students to encourage a love of reading. During the school year, there are two worship services with Sunday school in between for

²³ Experian Marketing Services, *Experian Mosaic USA E-Handbook*, 64.

²⁴ Henrietta United Methodist Church, “Omnibus Charge/Church Conference Report of 2020,” *East Ohio Conference of the United Methodist Church*, 2020.

children, youth, and adults. As indicated in the Mosaic groupings, the residents of this area are committed to the community and willing to volunteer, especially for church and school programs.²⁵

As the current pastor of Henrietta United Methodist Church, I am called to continue the ministry started here so many years ago and move the church forward by addressing the needs of this time. My faith journey began when I was born into a Christian family. I am the oldest of three daughters raised by our parents in a suburb just west of Cleveland, Ohio. My parents found a church home so they could worship and raise me in the Christian faith. My mother was raised Methodist, and my father was raised American Baptist. They found an American Baptist Church in town, began attending, and then joined that church. It would be their church for the rest of my mother's life and most of my father's.

When I was almost three years old, we moved into the house where I was raised and that I now own. Our church was just up the street, and we often walked. My childhood was filled with friends and fun. We lived in a safe neighborhood where we could leave in the morning to play, come back for lunch when the church bells rang at the Presbyterian Church up the street, play some more, and come home for dinner when the evening bells rang at the same church. Evenings were often spent outside as well, with parents in the neighborhood sitting out on their porches and enjoying the end of the day.

I started school and enjoyed learning, but I was very shy and did not talk very much. When I was about ten years old, my parents decided we should get a camper and travel for vacations in the summer. We had been camping in the summers for as long as I

²⁵ Experian Marketing Services, *Experian Mosaic USA E-Handbook*, 59, 64-65, 75, 79.

could remember in cabins, but then we had our own trailer. Over the years, we went to New England, the Dakotas, the Smoky Mountains, and many other destinations and learned a great deal about our country. My parents made sure each trip included some aspect of American history or other learning opportunities, which was fine with me. I enjoyed traveling and letting my imagination run wild as we went from place to place.

Each summer, I would get to spend a week with my maternal grandparents in Pennsylvania. My grandfather ran a monument business, and one of my favorite games was to pretend we were making and selling monuments. We would often spend days in cemeteries as grandpa placed and set completed memorial stones. Picnics in the cemeteries were a favorite, and grandma would always pack hard-boiled eggs and potato sticks, which I loved.

My great-grandmother lived in an apartment above the showroom. She had been widowed before I was born and moved to be near her daughter, my grandmother. While I knew all of my family loved me, I always felt my great-grandmother loved me in the best ways. She always stopped what she was doing when I came over and gave me her undivided attention. She would tell stories about when she was young and sing with me. She had a small electric organ in her apartment and took time to teach me how to play and read music. Great grandma was raised in the United Brethren Church and had played the organ in both the United Brethren and Methodist churches. She also made the best M&M cookies I ever had. They are my favorite cookies to this day.

One summer visit also included Vacation Bible School at the Methodist Church across the street from my grandparents' home. They attended another Methodist Church in town, but this one had Vacation Bible School while I was visiting, so off I went. We

sang, heard Bible stories, and made crafts. I was probably in first or second grade, and I still remember how much fun I had, even though I did not know anyone when I started.

Back at home, life included lots of church activities. Mom and dad were very active in the church, serving on many boards and committees through the years. One of my earliest memories is playing under the coffee table at a church lady's house while my mother attended her American Baptist Women's Circle meeting. My mother taught first and second-grade Sunday school. I attended Sunday school from the time I was in the nursery. Teaching teams rotated throughout the year, so I had many teachers and remember enjoying them all. Many of these teachers would continue to be important in my life as I grew.

God was an acknowledged part of my life from the time I was born. I was dedicated in the church as an infant, taught the Bible stories while I was growing up, and was urged to make a commitment of my life to Christ each Sunday during the closing hymn, which was also an altar call (although in a very 'mainline church' rather than evangelical way). When I was eleven years old, I decided I truly believed in Jesus and walked to the front of the church during the closing hymn. I was welcomed by the pastor, greeted by a deacon of the church, and then presented to the congregation after the hymn concluded. The minister told them I would be enrolled in the membership class, and they could look forward to my baptism in the months to come. A number of my friends and I went through the membership classes together and were baptized on the same Sunday. We put on our white robes, lined up outside the baptistry, walked into the water one at a time while the choir sang, "Just as I am without one plea..." answered "Yes" when the pastor asked if we believed in Jesus Christ as our Savior and wanted to be baptized, were

submerged into the water dying to our sins, and raised up, cleansed, and new believers. We were then received by deaconesses who took us to the changing rooms, where we dried and changed into our church clothes. We then made our way to the sanctuary where we received the “Right Hand of Fellowship,” as it was called in that church, and became full members. There was a reception afterward where I was surprised to receive gifts from many of my Sunday school teachers as well as family members. I had not realized it was such a big deal.

In sixth grade, I was old enough to join the youth group at church, but I was shy and not sure I wanted to attend. Although I knew the other youth involved, I was scared and not willing to go to something unknown. One Sunday, my friend invited me to youth group. He said he would meet me there and stay with me so I would be comfortable. That changed my life. I went to youth group that night, and they were moving furniture from the parlor to the youth room. The parlor was being renovated, and the youth received the old couches and chairs. I was able to blend right in and participate. After that, I went all the time. We learned about religious leaders throughout the world. We went on retreats. We had fundraising dinners. All these things gave me a foundation for discipleship and living out a life of faith and service.

I felt at home in high school, yet there were also times when I was uncertain and often sad and somewhat depressed. I would have mood swings that I now believe were hormonal and made me weepy, but most of the time, I was happy. I had lots of friends, in many clubs and groups, and found spaces where I could be myself and grow. I played guitar, having taken lessons from third to ninth grades. I was in the drama club, making sets and running lights. I was in Rainbow Girls, a Masonic youth organization, where I

held a number of offices culminating in Worthy Advisor, which is similar to the president of the club, for a term of a few months. I also continued to be active in the Baptist Youth Fellowship (BYF) at church.

When I was a sophomore, the pastor suggested that the youth take a work trip to the American Baptist Assembly grounds in Green Lake, Wisconsin. We spent most of a year fundraising and planning and then traveled to Green Lake to tear down an old bathhouse that the American Baptist Assembly planned to transform into a cabin. We had a great time and grew closer as a group. I made friends with some of the older members who were close to graduation and left with great memories as well as a love for the Assembly grounds at Green Lake. We went back again the following year to do a different project and then to an American Baptist National Youth Conference a few years later. The trip to the American Baptist National Youth Conference was organized through the Cleveland Baptist Association, which was my first introduction to the larger American Baptist presence in the greater Cleveland area and to the worldwide American Baptist denomination.

As I attended these conferences and stayed active in youth group and Sunday school, I had opportunities to deeply discuss issues of faith with my friends and caring adults. At the time, contemporary Christian music was just becoming a movement, with the “2nd Chapter of Acts” being one of the most well-known musical groups. Leaders who were musically gifted regionally and nationally used their talents to write theme songs and other music for our youth conferences and retreats, making the Bible and conference themes come alive. We would bring the songs back home with us and share them with the congregation. We also had a youth choir at church that sang newly written

songs in worship. Looking back, I appreciate how open this congregation was to hearing music that was new and different.

Through all these experiences, I felt a growing call to ministry. I attended The Defiance College, majoring in Christian Education. During my fieldwork, I discovered a love for leading youth ministry, which would lay a foundation for my ministry for many years to come. At the end of college, I was married, and my husband and I moved to the Cleveland area. I found an interim Christian education and youth ministry position at a United Church of Christ, filling in while their staff person was on maternity leave. When that job was completed, I got a full-time staff position as Director of Christian Education and Youth Ministry at an American Baptist Church in an eastern suburb of Cleveland. I used my own experiences as a model and adapted activities and programs to fit the needs of the youth and the church. I also became involved in the Cleveland Baptist Association, serving on many boards and committees over the years. As the years went on, I had various jobs in Christian Education, Family Ministry, and Youth Ministry as a staff member in churches around the Cleveland area. I was blessed to be invited to serve on staff at various National American Baptist Youth Conferences at Green Lake and other locations throughout the United States. I wrote curriculum, worked with a team to design yearly retreats and workshops, and coordinated the association's youth leadership training program. The ability to relate to youth, be open to their needs, and understand them was a clear gift from God and one of the skills I had been given to bring glory to God through the churches I served.

Through the years, my husband and I were blessed with five children and an income that allowed me to stay at home for a few years. When our oldest child was

beginning his senior year of high school, my husband was laid off when his company decided to downsize its operations. At the same time as he was let go, many other IT professionals had been laid off as well. So, as he began his job search, employers were receiving 300 or more applications for each posted position. There was nothing available, and his job search went nowhere. We were on food stamps and unemployment, and it became obvious that I would need to go back to work as he tried to find a new job.

We were now members of a United Methodist Church in our town. I interviewed at a number of churches but did not find anything that really inspired me or felt right until I went to a United Methodist church about thirty minutes west of where I was. They were hiring a Director of Youth Ministries and needed someone to rebuild their youth program from the ground up. I interviewed and got the job getting right into things as the pastor had me attend and assist with confirmation classes. We began laying the foundations for a solid youth ministry, and through the years, God blessed it with strong, faithful youth, parents, and leaders.

God told me it was time to pursue full-time ministry. I had set aside plans for seminary many years before when there were no American Baptist seminaries close by, but now I was a United Methodist, and there were schools within a few hours of me. I began the process of candidacy, but it was not until I arrived at my next job that things really began to take off. During this process, I left the above church after almost five years. I spent the next few months applying for youth ministry jobs, finally finding one about thirty minutes south of me. This church was in a different district and had a caring, supportive pastor who, when he learned my candidacy was stalled in my district, invited me to move my membership and had things back on track within a few days.

The youth ministry at the new church focused more on healing pains from previous experiences, as a longtime youth leader had left and was followed by a person who had stayed a very short time before being forced out. She was there long enough to establish relationships and trust with the youth but was caught up in a power play by some other leaders in the church and forced to leave. Fortunately, most of the adults involved in this had left by the time I arrived, but the experience had left the youth hurt and in need of healing. As I got to know the church and the youth better, I learned the youth were also very cliquish and would often leave others out, making them feel like they did not belong. Changing this behavior pattern became a high priority, so we focused on what Christian community really meant and how we could live it out in every aspect of our lives, especially at church.

The ministry at this church grew and expanded, with most of the youth becoming active and faithful disciples of Christ. They devoted themselves to God and service, reaching out to others, serving in and through the congregation, and going out on mission trips each summer. One of the students suggested having a mission workday each month and calling it “First Sunday Missions,” which we did. The youth group members made themselves available to the congregation and community members to do work projects on the first Sunday of every month, and their adult leaders supported them in their efforts. They got along well and built friendships that have continued long after graduation. I saw many of them at my daughter’s wedding in September 2019, where they gathered as a youth group for a celebratory toast.

In 2012, while I was working at that church, my father passed away. He had been missing for a few days, and during the time people were searching for him, I was faced

with the reality that almost everything in that situation was out of my control. I decided to fully rest in God's love and direction, which has given me a sense of freedom and joy that continues to make life an adventure. I went to Licensing School in 2014, became a Licensed Local Pastor in the United Methodist Church, and have now served in four appointments, graduating from seminary and becoming commissioned along the way. I was ordained as a United Methodist Elder in June 2022. Being a pastor has been a blessing. I have discovered skills and talents I did not realize I had. I have been equipped to do the ministry God called me to do. I am still able to relate to youth but can also relate to people of all ages, from the crib to the oldest senior citizen. Throughout the years, I have kept in touch with many of those who were active in the children and youth ministries of the churches where I served. Many are now young adults who have often stopped attending church and/or are looking for ways to deepen their faith and recapture the spark and feelings they had in high school but have not found a way to do so.

This doctoral project focused on the need of the church to share the love of God with young adults and the need of young adults to grow in faith and discipleship as they mature and live out their lives as Christians. A deeply held faith and committed faith practices will provide guidance, values, and most of all, hope, as they make life decisions and find ways to serve in the world. The culture in the United States has changed since Sunday school, and many traditional ministries were started. People's activities, schedules, and attitudes have changed. Yet, for the most part, the traditional church's schedule, style, and expectations have stayed the same. Even those who are deeply committed to the church and its ministries are often away for work, family, and sporting events. In facing this reality, it is vital to make the church in all its forms accessible to

people using various resources including, but not limited to internet resources, offsite worship at sporting events and other functions, and group worship and learning events in the community throughout the week. This project sought to expand the vision and definition of “church” to include worship, activities, small groups, and classes that are always available to all people, but especially to young adults using various technologies.

The COVID-19 pandemic began during preparations for this project and has had a major impact on traditional churches as many chose to stop meeting in person during the height of the pandemic for the safety of their congregants and staff. In order to continue to worship and carry out ministries, many found ways to function online through the use of live streamed or recorded worship services, online group meetings via various platforms, creating the option of online giving, and using websites as well as social media pages and accounts to share news, prayer for others, and keep in contact with each other. Churches found ways to stay connected by assessing the needs of the congregation and creatively finding ways to address those needs and be the church to a world in crisis. New venues were utilized, such as parks, parking lots, and drive-in movie theaters where people could worship while safely staying in their cars or staying at a safe social distance from each other.²⁶ Churches that found ways to adapt are now in a position to ask the question, “What else would God have us do in this time?”

While vaccines are now approved in the United States, there are still areas of the country where people have not been vaccinated in high numbers through choice or lack

²⁶ While many of these venues have been used by churches for years, for many of the churches, the idea of relocating out of the sanctuary for weeks or months was groundbreaking and courageous.

of opportunity.²⁷ Variants of the virus are spreading and causing case numbers to fluctuate. Each church will need to continue to monitor the situation in their area to decide on the most appropriate ways to continue to worship and serve God as the pandemic continues. We still serve a living God who calls us to reach out to others, become baptized disciples, and teach others all that Christ taught when he lived on earth. If the church is going to answer God's call effectively, then it will break out of the patterns established generations ago, expanding the possibilities for witness, evangelism, and care so that people have opportunities that fit their schedules, priorities, and needs to grow deeper in their faith and understanding of God. Even if the virus disappeared tomorrow, the church would still need to follow the Spirit's leading into doing ministry in new and different ways.

This project focused on reaching young adults through the use of technology. It was implemented through the following process: an online survey to assess their current interest and connection to their professed faith; the opportunity to join the project and register through a separate link; eight weeks of using the website, hard copy resources, and applications focused on Bible study, prayer, or discipleship; journaling about their questions, discoveries, and experiences; meeting online or in-person with myself at the midway point and end of the study for an interview assessing the applications and addressing any questions or concerns, and a closing survey to help assess perceived change or growth. Participants were identified by name during the study, but had anonymous usernames overseen by a colleague for journals and surveys. I believed that by using these applications, project participants would spend more time intentionally

²⁷ Danielle Ivory et al., "See How Vaccinations Are Going in Your County and State," *New York Times*, September 22, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/us/covid-19-vaccine-doses.html>.

focusing on aspects of discipleship than they acknowledged at the start of the project and that the amount of time using the application(s) would grow as they continued through the project.

Throughout history, Christianity has adapted and changed to better reach the population and world with the good news of Jesus Christ. The church in Henrietta Township, Ohio, has done the same. From its beginning as a Christian home for Swiss immigrants, it has kept its focus on proclaiming God's message of grace, love, salvation, and discipleship. The congregation adapted by purchasing land and building a church; building a parsonage in order to provide for a full-time pastor; expanding the building over the years as needs arose and looking outside of the church to grow in discipleship as they have found ways to serve the needs of others. They are a loving and determined presence in the community and have adapted their ministries throughout the pandemic to continue to make God's presence known and to be the church. They are open to new ideas and trying new ministries to make and mature disciples and, as such, have been a strong asset to pursuing this study. God has provided ways to continue to reach young adults who are being bombarded with demands on their time. The church just needs to awaken to the possibilities and provide for the real needs of this segment of the population. The possibilities for ministry are endless. With the guidance of the Holy Spirit, a church in a rural community in Ohio could make a huge difference for the Kingdom of God in the world.

CHAPTER TWO

BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS

Introduction

Traditional Christianity in a postmodern Western world faces a challenge that hits at its core practices and systems. Mainline denominations, especially in the United States, have found a comfortable level of standard practices that run and guide the local church as well as regional and national ministries. These practices, which include but are not limited to worship on Sunday mornings, Sunday school classes for children, youth, and adults, youth ministry for students in grades six through twelve, women's and men's ministry, and weekly Bible studies, were honed and 'perfected' over many decades to reach the perceived needs of new believers and those living out their faith. Unfortunately, the practices took precedence over the realities and needs of a changing society. While the cultural expectations outside of the church have changed since the 1950s when many of these systems were designed, inside the church expectations often stayed the same or became entrenched and more demanding. For the church to pursue its directive and call to share the good news of Jesus Christ with the whole world and to make disciples, it must begin to look for new ways to bring the message to the current culture. One of the ways to do this is through embracing new technologies through the presence, power, and leading of the Holy Spirit.

Since the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost as told in the book of the Acts of the Apostles, those who believe in Jesus have shared the Good News of his coming with those around them and with new generations. As they did, there were times and situations that called for new approaches, and they followed the leading of the Holy Spirit to go places where they would not usually have gone. The traditional church finds itself in such a place today as it seeks to share the good news of the Gospel with a new generation in a post-Christian world. Young adults, especially, have multiple priorities vying for their time, many of which have an impact on their life goals. In the past, it was enough for the church to tell people to come on Sunday mornings, inform while also informing the congregants of times and dates for other ministries, and people would come. In the modern world, however, that commitment rarely exists. People will attend in person if the ministry or event meets certain needs and if they feel they have time. The church must find ways to become accessible off-site to be a consistent living part of people's lives.

To do this, the church must pursue creative ways to be accessible and share the gospel message when people are available and in ways, they are willing to access. One way to do this is by using cutting-edge and innovative technologies that most of the population under age fifty regularly uses and/or even creates themselves. Apps, games, social media, and other platforms are in common use and have been familiar to many of them since childhood. If the church would use these technologies, they could reach many more young people, thereby helping to make and grow disciples of Jesus Christ. Christian believers and those seeking to learn more about the faith would have access to information, prayer connections, studies, games, and more twenty-four hours a day and

seven days a week. The church would be always accessible to everyone instead of only predetermined times on certain days.

In considering ways to reach out to new generations with the Good News of Jesus Christ, it is helpful to look at the scriptures and see what leading and insights they contain. In the New Testament, Jesus commissions the disciples to share the good news of Jesus Christ with the whole world. The Acts of the Apostles follows the beginning of their efforts to do so. It opens with Jesus leaving the disciples as he ascends into heaven after giving them instructions to go back to Jerusalem and wait for the Holy Spirit to come to them. The Holy Spirit arrives at Pentecost with wind and fire after which the disciples begin to speak and preach, and the church begins to form. Believers are baptized and then come together to learn from the disciples and to begin leading lives according to the teachings of Jesus, the risen Messiah.

In Acts 8:26-40, the Angel of God calls Philip to go to the road between Jerusalem and Gaza. The Angel does not explain why or what he is to do when he gets there, but he obediently goes and soon encounters an Ethiopian official. The Ethiopian is reading Isaiah as he travels, questioning what the scripture means, and needing more information and connection to bring a deeper understanding. God provides in an unexpected way and Philip answers the call that brings the man into the new Christian faith. The scripture shows God working in an unusual way by sending Philip to an Ethiopian eunuch answering the Ethiopian's need for understanding. Questions are asked and answered, and Philip's openness to the questions the Ethiopian has about scripture, God, and Jesus provides an opportunity for the gospel message to be proclaimed, understood, and accepted. As a result of Philip's willingness to go, the Ethiopian comes

to faith and Philip baptizes him. The Ethiopian is then able to share the faith with others he would meet on his journey and with those in his homeland.

Acts of the Apostles

The book of the Acts of the Apostles is in the New Testament of the Christian Bible and placed in the canon following the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Acts is a follow-up to the Gospel of Luke and continues to trace the actions and activities of Jesus' disciples following the resurrection. Joseph Fitzmyer writes that scholars believe that the author of the two books (Luke-Acts) wrote them anywhere from the AD mid-60s through AD 130.¹ Three main schools of thought exist regarding the date of composition: an early date in the mid-60s, a middle date of the 80s, and a late date from AD 100-130.² Those who support early dating point out that Acts fails to mention the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 or the death of Paul believed to have occurred sometime between AD 64 and 68.³ The book of Acts ends by explaining that Paul spent two years in his rented house in Rome receiving visitors and teaching about the kingdom of God and about Jesus (Acts 28:30-31). There is no mention of what happened following that two-year period, which leaves much to speculation. Did Paul have his trial? Was he released? Was he executed? The author gives no clear information beyond the two years. While church tradition holds that the Romans executed Paul, independent verification has not been found.

¹ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles, The Anchor Bible: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1998), 51-54.

² Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 51-53.

³ Charles B. Puskas and David Crump, *An Introduction to the Gospels and Acts* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008), location 1463, Kindle.

Charles B. Puskas and David Crump compiled a range of scholarly theories on this issue one of which says the story that Acts tells had reached the current time. They also theorize that the author chose not to go farther because Paul's situation was not resolved or that the purpose of the book was "at least in part, to influence the outcome of Paul's trial."⁴ Other suggestions are that Paul was freed after his two years of house arrest before leaving to continue his ministry, or that he was executed but the author decided not to include Paul's death.⁵ In the opening of the Gospel of Luke, the author (who scholars believe wrote both Luke and Acts) states:

Since many have undertaken to set down an orderly account of the events that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, I too decided, after investigating everything carefully from the very first, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the truth concerning the things about which you have been instructed (Lk. 1:1-4).

If the author put together the account close to the time of the founding of Christianity, it would have made sense for the account to include the most up-to-date information that would include the freedom or execution of Paul had either happened. In an analysis of early dating for Acts, Joseph Fitzmyer points out that Acts leaves out the persecution of Christians in Rome under Nero and that "the tone of Acts is basically one of joy and peace, revealing Luke's obvious affection for Paul."⁶ Fitzmyer argues that no one in the present time really knows why Acts ends where it does.⁷

⁴ Puskas and Crump, *An Introduction to the Gospels and Acts*, locations 1463-1468, Kindle.

⁵ Puskas and Crump, *An Introduction to the Gospels and Acts*, locations 1469-1475, Kindle.

⁶ Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 51.

⁷ Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 51.

Hans Conzelmann writes that if the author is Luke the physician who was a companion of Paul mentioned in Colossians, 2 Timothy, and Philemon, one would expect a date between 60 CE and 100 CE. Conzelmann advocates for a date between 80 CE and 100 CE stating that this timeframe “best fits all of the evidence.”⁸ Will Willimon in *Acts* similarly concludes Acts was written between A.D. 70 and 100 “somewhere in the Mediterranean world.”⁹ Puskas and Crump support a date between A.D. 70 and 90 believing it was written “near the time of the destruction of Jerusalem...”¹⁰ They stress that “Luke-Acts seems to be characteristic of the time just before the early catholic writing of 1 Clement (95) and works by Ignatius (115) and Justin Martyr (140).”¹¹ Fitzmyer’s analysis of the arguments of those who support intermediate dating for the composition of the book include the statement in Luke 1:1 included above, which says that “many have undertaken to set down an orderly account...” (Lk. 1:1). If many had made the attempt, sometime must have passed. Fitzmyer also points out that there are some verses in Acts that seem to allude to the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem although Acts fails to mention it explicitly.¹² The arguments for late dating are fewer and seem to rest on scholars seeing other writers as influencing the work of the author of Acts. This begs the question, however, of whether others influenced Luke-Acts, Luke-

⁸ Hans Conzelmann, *Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1987), xxxiii.

⁹ William H. Willimon, *Acts, Interpretation: A Biblical Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1988), 1.

¹⁰ Puskas and Crump, *An Introduction to the Gospels and Acts*, locations 1489-1493, Kindle.

¹¹ Puskas and Crump, *An Introduction to the Gospels and Acts*, locations 1489-1493, Kindle.

¹² Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 53.

Acts perhaps influenced others, or the story they told was so widespread that caused the similarities.¹³

It seems most likely that the books were written in the intermediate period of the 80s. The introduction to Luke gives the most clues to this assessment as the author speaks of other attempts to write accounts as well as having eyewitness testimony handed down. The tone of the beginning of Luke is that some time passed since the life of Christ and much transpired. So much transpired, in fact, that the author spent time investigating so an “orderly account” (Lk. 1:1) could be written. The Gospel of Luke is the author’s account of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, and the Acts of the Apostles is the author’s account of the coming and working of the Holy Spirit as Christ’s church was formed and established on earth.

An overlap exists in the content that closes the Gospel of Luke (Lk. 24:48-53) and the summary that begins Acts (Acts 1:3-9) both of which describe Jesus’ ascension into heaven. The author introduces both books with a message to Theophilus with the Gospel of Luke explaining the purpose of the writings more thoroughly as mentioned above, and some believe that the same author wrote both books.¹⁴ The identity of Theophilus was lost to time. The author, also lost to time, was historically connected to Luke the physician, but there are scholars who dispute that conclusion and believe the author is someone else. Although Fitzmyer supports the historical view, he mentions Conzelmann,

¹³ Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 53.

¹⁴ Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 49.

Haenchen, Koester, and others who disagree and choose to leave the author's identity anonymous.¹⁵

The origin of the title of the book is also unknown. There are references using this title that date back to the "end of the second century."¹⁶ The term as a description of the book is, however, a bit confusing. As Fitzmyer describes it, "The ancient title *Praxeis* was a term designating a specific Greek literary form, a narrative account of the heroic deeds of famous or historical or mythological figures."¹⁷ However, Fitzmyer points out that the author of Acts "tends to ascribe the achievements or exploits of Peter and Paul to the risen Lord and his Spirit or to God rather than the Apostles themselves."¹⁸ That the author gave the book the name it currently has is doubtful.

As mentioned above, Acts of the Apostles begins with a summary of the Gospel of Luke and then takes up the story of the disciples as Jesus ascends to heaven. They wait in Jerusalem until the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit comes with a rush of wind and tongues like fire (Acts 2:1-3). The people hear the disciples speaking in different languages, Peter stands and begins to preach, and 3000 people are baptized (Acts 2:41) beginning the new movement which would become known as Christianity. The book then follows the movement and growth of these new Jesus followers.

By Acts chapter eight, believers met together and learned from the disciples. The movement continued to grow, and many miracles were performed to the amazement of the people. The disciples continued preaching and telling anyone who would listen about

¹⁵ Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 50.

¹⁶ Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 47.

¹⁷ Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 47.

¹⁸ Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 47.

Jesus' life, teachings, and call for repentance and baptism. Their activity upsets the leaders of the Temple in Jerusalem who begin arresting, questioning, and punishing believers and leaders. A beloved leader of the community, Stephen, is stoned to death after testifying to his beliefs, and in his stoning, the text introduces readers to Saul who is a key leader of the Temple focusing on persecuting and condemning the members of this new group.

Philip, the Angel of the Lord, the Spirit of the Lord, and the Ethiopian

This leads to the pericope that is the focus of this study. Philip was in Samaria sharing the word of God and bringing people to belief in the Messiah. Peter and John, the apostles, joined him there, and through prayer and the laying on of hands, the Holy Spirit came to the believers. Peter and John then moved on to continue their preaching throughout Samaria. Now, an Angel of the Lord comes to Philip giving him direction that will change the life of one person.

This is a major change from the narrative of the movement to this point. Almost all the activity was directed toward groups of people and Jewish people in particular. While others perhaps heard the message and were welcomed into the fellowship, the main emphasis was the chosen people of God who traced their lineage back to Abraham. They were the people to whom the Messiah was promised, so they were the first to hear the good news that he had come. The chapters of Acts up to this point highlight the disciples and evangelists preaching to crowds of people. Mentions of interactions with individuals are rare, but those mainly highlight conflicts. In this passage, however, God

sends Philip to speak directly to one person—an Ethiopian eunuch—who may or may not be of Jewish heritage.

The main action in this passage takes place on the road from Jerusalem to Gaza referred to as the Wilderness Road or the Desert Road, and features Philip, the Angel of the Lord, an Ethiopian eunuch, and the Spirit of the Lord. There are two different men named Philip mentioned in the New Testament including the disciple of Jesus and Philip the evangelist. Leopoldo A. Sanchez in the article, “Can Anything Good Come Out of ___?: Come and See! Faithful Witness in Marginality and Hospitality,” lifts up Philip as one called to the marginalized. He states:

Philip is a deacon and then an evangelist among marginal characters, amidst people excluded at some level from the community because of their cultural-linguistic or ethnic-religious identity. These people include Greek-speaking Jewish widows who are not fully accepted or apparently are being “neglected” by Hebrew-speaking Jews in the distribution of food (Acts 6:1). Philip is also sent by the Spirit to Samaritans who are not seen by the Jews as worthy of receiving God’s blessings (8:1-8), and to an Ethiopian eunuch who, though a God-fearer, would not have been allowed in the temple (8:27).¹⁹

In this story, Philip the evangelist just completed a journey with Peter and John in Samaria. By the time of this encounter, along with his heart for the marginalized, he established his skill at evangelism. Felicia Howell LaBoy, in her article, “You Want Me to Talk to Whom?: Explorations in Fear and Faith from the Underside of the Bible,” points out that Philip’s cultural background was also a key factor in his ministry. She states, “He is most likely a more Hellenized convert, capable of bridging both Jewish and Gentile worlds. As such, Philip would be able to cross both cultural borders easily.”²⁰

¹⁹ Leopoldo A. Sanchez, “Can Anything Good Come Out of ___?: Come and See! Faithful Witness in Marginality and Hospitality,” *Concordia Journal* 41, no. 2 (2015): 119.

²⁰ Felicia Howell LaBoy, “You Want Me to Talk to Whom?: Explorations in Fear and Faith from the Underside of the Bible,” *Review and Expositor* 115, no. 1 (2018): 32, doi:10.1177/0034637317754282.

God equipped Philip for the task at hand, and Philip responds immediately, faithfully, and unquestioningly when God calls.

In this case, the Angel of the Lord calls upon Philip and Philip willingly follows instruction. As told, he goes to the wilderness road and sees an Ethiopian official. The Spirit of the Lord then tells Philip to approach the chariot. Esau McCaulley, in his book, *Reading While Black*, points out that “The angel redirected him so that he might encounter an Ethiopian eunuch in charge of the treasury for the queen mother of Ethiopia. Within the narrative world of Acts, the conversion of this Ethiopian manifests God's concern for the nations of the world.”²¹ While the Ethiopian is a powerful man representing a powerful queen, he is a stranger to Philip and outside of the norms of his evangelistic ministry to this point. In fact, the book of Acts previously fails to mention Ethiopians, not even in the listing of nations present at the coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. This man is different from Philip in many ways including culture, social status, gender identity, and religion, and yet, God intentionally sends Philip to him and intentionally instructs Philip to approach him.

When Philip approaches, he hears the Ethiopian reading from the scroll of Isaiah. McCaulley observes, “The Ethiopian could only be familiar with Isaiah if he already knew something of the God of Israel. This shows a deep African connection to the God of the Bible.”²² Philip engages the Ethiopian respectfully, which—as this chapter discusses later—perhaps was not always the case for eunuchs in the ancient world. Joseph Fitzmyer notes that “The Book of Isaiah was always a well-read book of the OT

²¹ Esau McCaulley, *Reading While Black: African American Biblical Interpretation as an Exercise in Hope* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2020), 108-109.

²² McCaulley, *Reading While Black*, 109.

among Jews, as the number of copies of it found in Qumran caves reveals. The eunuch was reading to himself aloud, as was the custom in antiquity.”²³ Philip asks if the man understands what he is reading and hears that the eunuch fails to understand and cannot understand unless someone explains it, which Philip offers to do. The eunuch accepts his offer, and Philip joins the Ethiopian eunuch in the chariot as they discuss the passage. Philip sheds a Christological light on the passage, interpreting the Servant Song of Isaiah chapter fifty-three in light of Jesus’ recent suffering, death, and resurrection. Fitzmyer again observes, “The Christological interpretation of the Servant Song is ancient among Christians...even if one cannot show that it derives from Jesus himself.”²⁴

The explanation and conversation move the Ethiopian to faith. Philip provides the means of salvation to this man who was searching. God sees the need and answers the Ethiopians’ desire. Once convicted of the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ, there providentially appears before them a body of water. The God who provides the evangelist also provides the means of baptism once the Ethiopian comes to faith. The eunuch asks what is to prevent him from being baptized, which is a question that goes deeper than just surface level, yet Philip makes no objection to his baptism. They both go down to the water, Philip baptizes the Ethiopian, and then, in verse thirty-nine, “When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away...” (Acts 8:39). Philip had been faithful and done what God had called him to do. Once complete, God whisks him away to a new ministry challenge. Philip is obedient and willing to use the gifts of the

²³ Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 413.

²⁴ Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 414.

Spirit in service to the Lord. By doing so, a new soul is added to the baptized believers and goes on his way rejoicing.

Angel of the Lord, Spirit of the Lord

The Angel of the Lord appears first in this passage calling Philip to go. The Angel brings a directive from the Lord that Philip is to follow. Fitzmyer notes that “The angel is introduced to make clear that this mission of Philip is God-inspired.”²⁵ Conzelmann goes even further saying that “The motif of miraculous divine guidance dominates, thereby making the significance of the first conversion all the more impressive.”²⁶ The hand of God is present throughout the story and reinforces the legitimacy of the conversion and baptism. After comparing this story with that of Cornelius, Willimon notes the following: “The mission to the gentiles depicted in the baptism of Cornelius, the presence of the gospel out here in the desert of Gaza with this Ethiopian of somewhat murky physical, religious, and ethnic status can only be attributed to the constant prodding of the Spirit.”²⁷ The Angel of the Lord is a different being than the Spirit of the Lord, and the Ethiopian is important enough for both of them to be involved in his conversion. While the Angel of the Lord calls Philip to go, it is the Spirit who directs his actions once he arrives. The Spirit of the Lord makes sure Philip approaches the Ethiopian empowering him to share the divine message with which he is entrusted. Once the mission is complete, the Spirit whisks Philip away to a new place. Is his next mission so urgent that

²⁵ Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 411.

²⁶ Conzelmann, *Acts of the Apostles*, 68.

²⁷ Willimon, *Acts*, 72.

he could not stay and give more instruction, or is the Ethiopian baptized in the Holy Spirit, ready to go home evangelizing others, and bringing the word of God and the gospel of Jesus Christ to his homeland, and no longer in need of Philip's witness?

Ethiopian Eunuch

The identity of the Ethiopian eunuch is complex, full of possibilities and questions that scholars continue to explore. According to the text, he is a court official of the Candace, which is the title for the queens of Ethiopia. He is said to oversee her entire treasury which would make him a person of some power and wealth. He is knowledgeable and trained in accounting as well as literate in more than one language as evidenced by the fact that Philip could understand him as he read aloud. LaBoy notes that he likely was fluent in many languages due to his position and his country's "reputation for trade."²⁸ She also points out that everything in the passage points to a man who is "not conflicted about his social status."²⁹ Willimon observes that,

Luke's audience would be fascinated with this Ethiopian. In the Greco-Roman world the term 'Ethiopian' was often applied to black people. The Odyssey speaks of 'far-off Ethiopians...the furthestmost of men...In other words, here is a person from an exotic land...someone whose dark skin made him an object of wonder and admiration among Jews and Romans.'³⁰

Sean D. Burke in his study *Queering the Ethiopian Eunuch*, lifts up the reality argued by Abraham Smith that "this racial identity would have enhanced the eunuch's class status,

²⁸ LaBoy, "You Want Me to Talk to Whom?," 35.

²⁹ LaBoy, "You Want Me to Talk to Whom?," 33.

³⁰ Willimon, *Acts*, 71.

because in Greco-Roman culture black Ethiopians were seen as ‘wealthy, wise, and militarily mighty.’”³¹

So, how does his status as a eunuch affect his social standing and the way the culture of the early church sees him? The text describes him right away as a eunuch, which usually means he was surgically rendered sterile. There were certain stigmas attached to this that would have left him marginalized in ancient society, however, some scholars argue that referring to someone in his position as a eunuch did not necessarily mean surgical sterilization took place. Both Fitzmyer and Willimon advocate for the possibility that this man was physically intact with Fitzmyer saying, “Greek *eunouchos* (in the LXX) and Hebrews *saris* did not always connote a castrated man...sometimes it meant merely ‘chamberlain,’...so it is not really possible to say in which sense the term is used here.”³² Willimon also points this out saying,

Contrary to popular interpretation, he need not be a castrated male who was excluded from the temple (Deut. 23:1). Rather, we are reading a story about an important man, a foreigner, though possibly a Jew, a powerful person who has much power and authority as the queen’s minister – except the power to understand the word of God.³³

In this last section Willimon’s argument falls apart. If the Ethiopian is powerful, respected, and admired in the ancient culture, and he is physically whole, what was to keep him from receiving instruction in the word of God while he was in Jerusalem? There would be any number of Jewish leaders ready to teach this stranger from afar about the prophecies of Isaiah and to answer his questions. However, that obviously failed to

³¹ Sean D. Burke, *Queering the Ethiopian Eunuch: Strategies of Ambiguity in Acts* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2013), 9-10.

³² Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 412.

³³ Willimon, *Acts*, 71.

happen since the Ethiopian is reading the scroll aloud but failing to understand what he reads and hoping for help when God sends Philip to him.

It is more likely that the Ethiopian in the story was a physically castrated eunuch unable to father children. This not only fits the narrative but brings additional depth to the meaning of the passage and the relatability of the narrative to people who experienced exclusion, confusion, and marginalization. In the article, “The Gospel, Zion’s Barren Woman, and the Ethiopian Eunuch,” Warren Austin Gage and John Randolph Beck note that “the eunuch had likely been castrated to prevent him from fathering children, thus removing one motive for self-dealing.”³⁴ This being the case, however, they point out, “if the Temple was his goal, we have good reason to believe the eunuch came away disappointed...An Ethiopian could not hope to enter the Temple beyond the court of the Gentiles.”³⁵ One of Gage and Beck’s supports for this statement is the Mosaic law found in Deuteronomy 23:1, which states “No one whose testicles are crushed or whose penis is cut off shall be admitted to the assembly of the Lord” (Dt. 23:1). They go further in their assessment by analyzing the Ethiopian’s emotional state saying,

In light of his exclusion from the Temple precincts and the sacrifices, there is tremendous pathos in the statement that the eunuch was ‘on his way home’ from Jerusalem. He had been separated from God’s people and banned from the Temple. His arduous journey had proved fruitless. Jerusalem had shown herself to be sterile, like the desert in which the encounter with Philip unfolds, unwilling and unable to offer salvation to one who sought it diligently. Nevertheless, we see evidence of the eunuch’s humility and persistence in that he continues to search the Scriptures.³⁶

³⁴ Warren Austin Gage and John Randolph Beck, “The Gospel, Zion’s Barren Woman and the Ethiopian Eunuch,” *Crux* 30, no. 2 (1994): 36.

³⁵ Gage and Beck, “The Gospel, Zion’s Barren Woman and the Ethiopian Eunuch,” 37.

³⁶ Gage and Beck, “The Gospel, Zion’s Barren Woman and the Ethiopian Eunuch,” 37.

Their assessment is direct and somewhat intense but has merit. If the Ethiopian traveled that great distance for the purpose of worshipping in Jerusalem as the scripture says, and full worship including access to the Temple is denied him, it would be frustrating and discouraging. It raises the question of what he knows and does not know of the Jewish faith, which also lends credence to the idea that he may have been a Gentile. The reality is how much he knew or did not know of Temple laws and practices are lost to time. The scripture makes it clear, however, that he comes away from his experience without receiving instruction in the scriptures as the scripture introduces him trying to comprehend the scroll of Isaiah.

Esau McCaulley speaks directly to the importance of the passage of scripture to which the Ethiopian is drawn saying,

I find significance in the fact that the Ethiopian eunuch was reading from a particular portion of the servant's narrative, namely the portion where it says justice was denied him. The eunuch was not materially poor, but as one who had been castrated he was in a socially ambiguous position because eunuchs were often despised. In a culture with strictly defined gender roles, he would be seen as aberrant. Is it possible that he felt that what had been done to him was a grave injustice – for which he was forced, for his own safety, to keep silent like the silently suffering Christ?³⁷

While Gage and Beck focus on the heartbreaking emotional anguish of rejection in Jerusalem, McCaulley brings out the pain that is also present in his life as a eunuch. He takes the view that the castration was forced upon the Ethiopian, which is a valid possibility, and that the ramifications of that castration continue to affect his day-to-day life beyond what one would reasonably expect. LaBoy, however, pushes back against the assumption that eunuchs were automatically looked down upon or considered lower than

³⁷ McCaulley, *Reading While Black*, 110-111.

their intact counterparts. She shares the work of Marianne Kartzow to support her claim saying,

Marianne Kartzow contends that the social status for eunuchs was dependent upon their class background prior to becoming eunuchs. In particular, she maintains that their social status relies much on the fact of whether they had been slaves prior to castration. According to Kartzow, prior class as ‘slave’ and/or subsequent castration denies full access to the highest levels of society.³⁸

LaBoy states she prefers to honor, raise up, and “highlight the wealth, power, and prestige of the *black* Ethiopian official.”³⁹ She further asserts that “most of the exegetical essays on the encounter between Philip and the Ethiopian official focus on the deficiency of the Ethiopian official (i.e., he is a *eunuch*) with only cursory attention to the might and majesty of the empire which he represented—a critical mistake in interpreting how early audiences first heard the text.”⁴⁰

Her point is well-taken and deserves serious consideration. The Ethiopian travels as one with power and authority having a chariot and, possibly, a retinue of people with him (although scripture fails to mention them). Yet, the scripture immediately mentions his status as a eunuch as an important identifying component of his identity. Modern readers and audiences first hear the neutering and removal of masculinity, but is that what ancient audiences would hear? The Ethiopian is not just an exotic man from a land far away traveling to Jerusalem, but a eunuch. Unless there was an outward mark, band, or required outerwear for eunuchs, how would someone know that this man was altered? If LaBoy is correct, Luke’s inclusion of the Ethiopian’s identity as a eunuch would have

³⁸ LaBoy, “You Want Me to Talk to Whom?,” 33.

³⁹ LaBoy, “You Want Me to Talk to Whom?,” 29.

⁴⁰ LaBoy, “You Want Me to Talk to Whom?,” 29.

told the audience a great deal more than modern listeners' grasp. In that one-word, ancient audiences would know, and probably be in awe, of the 'wealth, power, and prestige' LaBoy emphasizes. Philip certainly approaches the Ethiopian with respect, and a close reading of the scripture shows there perhaps is a sense of awe or intimidation at the power of the Ethiopian because the evangelist needs the prodding of the Spirit to approach the chariot.

Why would an evangelist who an Angel of the Lord directs to be on this road at this time need additional prodding from the Spirit of the Lord to approach the only person traveling the road? Philip certainly did not hesitate to share the gospel message in Samaria. What is it about this man that causes Philip to hesitate? Disagreement and discussion regarding the religious affiliation and status of the Ethiopian exists. Was it the Ethiopian's culture, power, and social status that gives Philip pause, or was it, possibly, because the Ethiopian was a Gentile and the gospel message had failed to expand to the Gentiles yet? The scripture says the Ethiopian "had come to Jerusalem to worship and was returning home," but it is not clear if he had plans to go into the Temple or even whether he was Jewish, a proselyte, or an interested Gentile (Acts 8:27-28).

Some scholars believe the Ethiopian was a Jew who came to worship in Jerusalem, but his ability to worship at the Temple would have been unlikely due to his status as a eunuch. Some believe he was a proselyte to the Jewish faith who had traveled to the holy city. In either of these cases, it would seem logical that the Ethiopian would have known or been made aware of the restrictions regarding eunuchs in the Temple. Fitzmyer notes that according to Eusebius, the Ethiopian eunuch was "the first of the

Gentiles' to be converted to Christianity."⁴¹ Fitzmyer, himself, however disagrees feeling that "this...would be to assign a major development in the Lukan story to a minor character (Philip) in Acts."⁴² He posits that Gentile conversions fail to begin until after the calling of Paul and the conversion of Cornelius and therefore argues that the Ethiopian eunuch would be a Jew or a proselyte.⁴³ He does note that "A difficulty arises because Deut. 23:2 seems to exclude a eunuch from entering 'the assembly of the Lord'...However, Trito-Isaiah later developed a different view which may explain how Luke understands this eunuch from a far-off country as a diaspora Jew."⁴⁴

Fitzmyer also goes on to use Isaiah 56:3-4, which talks about future inclusion of eunuchs and others who follow God's laws to support his argument that this Ethiopian was a Jew coming to Jerusalem to worship further supporting this theory with the Ethiopian's reading of the scroll of Isaiah. These arguments fail to convince. Fitzmyer, notes that the author of Acts attributes the movement and activity in the early church to the Spirit and movement of God rather than to the people doing the ministry and evangelism. If the Spirit directs the baptism of the eunuch, which the story indicates, Philip's status as a major or minor character in the story would be irrelevant. Luke's commitment to Theophilus, as Luke chapter one states is to investigate and to "write an orderly account...so that [Theophilus could] know the certainty of the things [he] had been taught" (Lk. 1:3-4). Luke's placement of this story is intentional. The reasons are not quite as clear.

⁴¹ Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 410.

⁴² Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 410.

⁴³ Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 410.

⁴⁴ Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 410.

Fitzmyer's use of Isaiah is also problematic as the passage used as a support is a prophecy regarding a future time when God's "salvation...[and] righteousness...will be revealed" (Is. 56:1). Christians believe that the resurrection of Jesus ushered in this time, but there is no evidence that the Jewish leaders of the time were under that impression or that the laws of who were included and excluded from Temple worship changed. Further, using the Ethiopian reading the scroll of Isaiah as a support of his welcome in Jerusalem also falls short due to the Ethiopian's answer to Philip's question about understanding what he reads. If fully welcomed in Jerusalem and accepted into the Temple courts, ample scholars, teachers, and other learned priests would be willing to discuss and enlighten him on the meaning of the scroll. Scripture is clear that this was common practice in the Temple, and there is no reason to believe that it stopped once Jesus' followers began to preach. If accepted and welcomed, he would have gone on his way with new skills in interpreting and understanding the scriptures. The reality here, however, is that he was not accepted and welcomed. He could read the words and understand the language, but the meaning remained obscure without instruction. This Ethiopian official failed to receive full acceptance and instruction in Jerusalem. He travels home reading the scroll of Isaiah but is confused and dissatisfied.

Quite a few believe, like Eusebius, that the Ethiopian official was a Gentile and that this story represents the first conversion of a Gentile. Conzelmann notes that "the story was apparently told in Hellenistic circles as the first conversion of a Gentile."⁴⁵ This was not true in all circles as the conversion of Cornelius later in Acts was predominately deemed the first conversion of a Gentile with the conversion of the Ethiopian being seen

⁴⁵ Conzelmann, *Acts of the Apostles*, 67.

as a precursor to that momentous event because the Ethiopian was defined as a Jew or a proselyte. Those supporting Gentile identification for the Ethiopian include Beverly Gaventa who writes in the *New Interpreter's Bible: One-Volume Commentary*, "He is likely a Gentile. One's status is always determined in relation to a comparator group, and, in his characterization of the Ethiopian, Luke highlights both the Ethiopian's importance in his own world and his otherness in the world in which he now finds himself."⁴⁶ Cain Hope Felder in his book, *Troubling Biblical Waters: Race, Class, and Family*, points out that "Martin Hengel asserts without reservation that the Ethiopian minister is a Gentile God-fearer who is not only converted, but takes the gospel to the extreme southern boundary of the known world – Ethiopia."⁴⁷ Felicia Howell LaBoy states that the identifiers Luke uses clearly tell the audience that this person was a Gentile:

References to Nubia would also have signified that although the man was potentially a God-fearer and thus Gentile, he most certainly was not a Jew... Given the inclusion of the Ethiopian's race and ethnicity in the pericope, we must ask the question as to why the author of Luke-Acts, writing to a predominately Roman audience would include these aspects of the man's existential reality. According to both Keener and Martin, only one answer is plausible: the race and ethnicity of the official is included so as to provide further evidence of the author's claims of the universal scope of the Gospel message... In fact, the race and ethnicity of the Ethiopian official are so important to the theme of universality of the Gospel message of salvation that both Keener and Martin, along with several others, maintain that it is the Ethiopian's conversion that marks the first Gentile conversion in the biblical text, not the conversion of Cornelius.⁴⁸

It seems likely the Ethiopian is a Gentile who was introduced to the Jewish faith and was interested in learning more. Had he been fully Jewish by birth and a member of a Jewish

⁴⁶ Beverly Roberts Gaventa and David Peterson, eds., *The New Interpreter's Bible: One Volume Commentary* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2010), location 28798, Kindle.

⁴⁷ Cain Hope Felder, *Troubling Biblical Waters: Race, Class, and Family* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1989), 13.

⁴⁸ LaBoy, "You Want Me to Talk to Whom?," 34.

family or even surrounded by a Jewish faith community in Ethiopia, he would be familiar with the scriptures. The prophet Isaiah was not an obscure person in the scriptures. The book of Isaiah, as mentioned earlier, was very popular in the areas surrounding Jerusalem. One would expect that this prophet would be well-known throughout the Jewish world. If so, a Jewish Ethiopian would know and have at least a basic understanding of the prophet. As mentioned earlier, if Jewish or a proselyte, he also would be aware of the restrictions for worship at the Temple in Jerusalem. Would a eunuch still make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem knowing all of this? It is very possible. However, it seems doubtful that pilgrimage would be described as a journey to Jerusalem to worship when full worship at the Temple would not be permitted.

Whatever his true religious status, this man comes away from Jerusalem without finding the knowledge and explanations he sought. He is on his way home from a trip to Jerusalem to worship, which would take a good deal of time and planning, but there is no sense of fulfillment or joy in him as he travels and reads from the scroll of the prophet. Philip approaches and asks him if he understands what he reads. If fully embraced in Jerusalem, the Ethiopian would have at least a partial understanding, but he does not. He states, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" (Acts 8:31). There is a sense of frustration in the question. This is an intelligent man. He is a leader who gathers information and makes important decisions every day for the good of the country he serves and the queen who rules it. He is capable of discerning and understanding information, but there needs to be a basic knowledge and background of the subject matter. He does not seem to have this and definitely failed to receive help with it in Jerusalem. Philip provides answers and instruction.

Using the information from the passage, it seems obvious the Ethiopian was not fully accepted in Jerusalem and leaves disappointed. Whether it was his status as a eunuch, his cultural background, or his religious status, it does not seem like he was accepted or even offered answers to his questions regarding the scriptures. He is certainly not full of joy as he makes his way down this wilderness road. It is Philip, urged by the Spirit of the Lord, who sees the man in his need and offers solutions. Philip explains the passage and discusses the meaning with him. The Ethiopian listens. Likely he asks questions and receives answers. Philip shares the story of Jesus, and the Ethiopian believes what Philip says.

As Esau McCaulley notes, “This eunuch as a ‘despised thing’ found hope in the shamed Messiah whose resurrection lifts those with imposed indignities to places of honor...Christ showed the eunuch who he truly was.”⁴⁹ Gage and Beck note:

The eunuch had sought spiritual refreshment in Jerusalem, but come away thirsty. It is the word of God, Isaiah teaches, which waters the earth, causing it to bud and flourish. The eunuch illustrates this principle. The Holy Spirit bears fruit in the eunuch’s life through the word of God, recorded in Isaiah and expounded by Philip. As in faith the eunuch lays hold of the promise of God’s mercy, he is invited to the waters. Having drunk of the Living Water (John 4:10), he is welcome to the waters of baptism (Acts 8:38).⁵⁰

They continue to talk as they travel down the road and see water. The eunuch is moved and is eager to completely embrace this new faith and be baptized. The wording of the question, “What is to prevent me from being baptized?” gives further insight into the mindset of the Ethiopian official (Acts 8:36). Why would he assume there would be anything to prevent him from being baptized had others not prevented him from being

⁴⁹ McCaulley, *Reading While Black*, 111.

⁵⁰ Gage and Beck, “The Gospel, Zion’s Barren Woman and the Ethiopian Eunuch,” 38.

fully welcomed into other faith practices? In some versions of this passage, there is a back and forth between Philip and the Ethiopian in verse thirty-seven, “Then Philip said, ‘If you believe with all your heart, you may.’ And he answered and said, ‘I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God’” (Acts 8:37 NKJV). This conversation is not included in the earliest versions of Acts of the Apostles and is believed to be a later addition that may reflect a baptismal liturgy. The NRSV fails to include it.

Whether Philip answers the question or not, the Ethiopian commands the chariot to stop. He is determined to be baptized into this new faith. The message Philip brings awakens the Ethiopian to the hope, love, and joy present in the gospel message. They go down into the water, and the Ethiopian is baptized. The Spirit of the Lord then takes Philip away, and the Ethiopian never sees him again. However, Philip has done what the Spirit of the Lord needed him to do because the Ethiopian has been transformed. He is now a follower of Christ. He accepted and embraced this new faith, and he “went on his way rejoicing.” (Acts 8:39). This is a great contrast to his demeanor in the beginning of the passage.

Outcome

Legends abound that the Ethiopian not only shared his new faith with people in his travels home, but also became the founder of Christianity in Ethiopia. Gage and Beck mention, “The tradition among early Christians was that the eunuch went on to become the ‘father’ of the church in Ethiopia.”⁵¹ LaBoy points out the fortitude and strength of the Ethiopian writing, “I would argue that it is the Ethiopian’s own internal agency, even

⁵¹ Gage and Beck, “The Gospel, Zion’s Barren Woman and the Ethiopian Eunuch,” 42.

in the face of ‘contested social status,’ that allows for the evangelization of the Nubian kingdom and its ability to stand as a Christian kingdom for almost nine hundred years without Roman influence.”⁵² She goes on to cite Keener writing,

After the conversion of this Ethiopian, Nubia was a powerful and well-documented Christian kingdom that survived for almost one thousand years. Nubia was also one of the few countries in the ancient world that ‘was converted to Christianity without a prior experience of Roman rule’ after the Roman Empire’s ‘Christianization.’⁵³

Willimon goes all the way back to Eusebius to find support for the Ethiopian’s response to baptism writing, “Eusebius says that the Ethiopian whom Philip baptized returned home and became an evangelist (*Historia Ecclesiastica*; 2.2. 13-14).”⁵⁴

Felder, however, reminds readers that the Ethiopian was not lauded by everyone in the early church, writing “Western New Testament scholars have been perplexed at times by this episode, which may suggest that the Hellenist mission was responsible for bringing Christianity to Ethiopia in the first century.”⁵⁵ He goes on to point out that many discard the tradition when it comes to the Ethiopian. To his point, Fitzmyer notes in the *Anchor Bible* that “After this episode we hear no more of the Ethiopian eunuch. Presumably he continues on his journey, returns home, and spreads the good news there about Jesus the Christ, but the beginnings of Christianity in Nubia and Ethiopia cannot be traced back earlier than the fourth century A.D.”⁵⁶ Fitzmyer’s assertion of the earliest evidence of Christianity in Nubia and Ethiopia begs the question of how much research

⁵² LaBoy, “You Want Me to Talk to Whom?,” 33.

⁵³ LaBoy, “You Want Me to Talk to Whom?,” 36.

⁵⁴ Willimon, *Acts*, 72.

⁵⁵ Felder, *Troubling Biblical Waters*, 13.

⁵⁶ Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 411.

has really been done, and what the researchers use as a definition of Christianity. If the Ethiopian official in this pericope takes the good news of Jesus Christ to Ethiopia, his knowledge is based on what he learned from Philip and from the leading of the Holy Spirit.

The rituals, practices, and worship styles which were created would not be the same as those in Rome and the Western world. Possibly, the earliest missionaries intending to bring Christianity to Ethiopia found something so different from what they knew that they discounted it as an aberration or even heretical. Philip Jenkins shares a telling story in his book, *The Lost History of Christianity*, in which a Jesuit “was appalled at the arrogance of the long-isolated Ethiopian church.”⁵⁷ The Jesuit went on to say, “They are possessed with a strange notion that they are the only true Christians in the world; as for us, they shunned us as heretics.”⁵⁸ A Christian church at what was considered the edge of the known world had a strong solid Christian faith that failed to match the practices and, probably, some of the theology of visiting Europeans, so the Europeans were appalled.

In the same book, Jenkins describes the Muslim invasion of the late 1200s to 1300s that took over Nubia and most of the area surrounding it. He points out that:

Only Ethiopia remained as a bastion of African Christianity...A long series of defeats and disasters culminated in the early sixteenth century...The Muslim invaders proclaimed a sultanate of Habasha (Abyssinia), and many Christians defected to Islam. The nation’s monasteries were sacked, its art and manuscripts destroyed or plundered, so that much of our knowledge of earlier Christian

⁵⁷ Philip Jenkins, *The Lost History of Christianity: The Thousand-Year Golden Age of the Church in the Middle East, Africa, and Asia – and How It Died* (New York, NY: Harper One, 2008), 146.

⁵⁸ Jenkins, *The Lost History of Christianity*, 147.

Ethiopia perished forever...Although Christianity survived, it did so in vastly impoverished form.⁵⁹

If the history was lost, how can anyone say for certain when Christianity began in Ethiopia? Traditional accounts date back to Eusebius that the Ethiopian established Christianity in his homeland. Trade took place between the lands, and, while exotic, stories would make their way from Ethiopia to Jerusalem and would be shared among believers in the early church. The church the Jesuits found was well-established and had roots and a sufficiently solid foundation to confront what sounds like a contentious visit from European Christian missionaries. The church in Ethiopia knew its identity. There is good reason to believe it was founded and the good news brought to Ethiopia by someone who had had a direct encounter with the Holy Spirit.

The Angel of the Lord instructs Philip. Philip obediently and willingly goes to the Wilderness Road. The Ethiopian eunuch travels down the road past Philip, the Spirit of the Lord tells Philip to approach him, and he obeys. This leads to a conversation that transforms the Ethiopian's life and causes him to be baptized. Following baptism, he goes on his way with a spirit of rejoicing. Philip is taken away to Azotus where he continues sharing the good news of Jesus and moving the church forward. In addition to key words and phrases already explored, there are others worthy of consideration including the Wilderness Road, Candace, and baptism.

Wilderness Road

The Angel of the Lord instructs Philip to “‘Get up and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.’ (This is a wilderness road.)” (Acts 8:26).

⁵⁹ Jenkins, *The Lost History of Christianity*, 134.

Fitzmyer notes that this would have been a well-traveled road saying, “It was on a caravan route leading to Egypt, which someone traveling from Jerusalem to Ethiopia would naturally take.”⁶⁰ Conzelmann agrees that the author’s intention in naming the wilderness road “is not to describe a place, but simply to furnish some scenic detail.”⁶¹ He does point out, however, that W. C. van Unnik disagrees, writing that “He reads this text to mean that the command is deliberately paradoxical: the missionary is sent from flourishing success into the ‘desert’ as a test of his obedience.”⁶² LaBoy suggests that the importance of this is that “for a Hellenized Jew who is presumably alone, this ‘wilderness’ road is presumably fraught with danger.”⁶³

However, Sean D. Burke sees in the wilderness road deep symbolism encompassing not only a stretch of road, but also the realities of the Ethiopian’s life in “ambiguous space.”⁶⁴ He goes on to lift F. Scott Spencer’s observation that “the designation of the road on which the Ethiopian eunuch is traveling as wilderness or desert...evokes what he calls a ‘liminal zone’ [and notes that] this seems a fitting setting, for...liminality or ‘in-betweenness’ was a characteristic of ancient constructions of eunuchs.”⁶⁵ Gage and Beck go even more deeply into symbolism focusing on the ‘barrenness of the desert’ and saying, “The topography reflects the spiritual condition of

⁶⁰ Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 411.

⁶¹ Conzelmann, *Acts of the Apostles*, 68.

⁶² Conzelmann, *Acts of the Apostles*, 68.

⁶³ LaBoy, “You Want Me to Talk to Whom?,” 32.

⁶⁴ Burke, *Queering the Ethiopian Eunuch*, 126.

⁶⁵ Burke, *Queering the Ethiopian Eunuch*, 126.

the Ethiopian, as well as his physical disability” and then notes the change of topography with his transformation at baptism where there was water.⁶⁶

The wilderness surrounding Jerusalem is a dry desert that fits the symbolism of how the eunuch perhaps feels leaving Jerusalem without having all his questions answered or finding the instruction that he seeks. He obviously is not excitedly traveling home. Burke and Spencer’s points regarding the ambiguous nature of the eunuch are well-taken. As mentioned above, the man is an enigma in many ways and would be an enigma to the audience hearing the story. Was he a bit of an enigma to himself as well? He would be incapable of fathering children. He had a place in society, but it was a narrowly defined space. There were benefits, but with whom could he share those benefits? Some would admire and respect him for his intelligence and position, while others would look down upon him and despise him for being what they considered less than a man.

LaBoy and van Unnik’s ideas bring out the symbolism of the location for Philip. While LaBoy points out the danger ancient audiences would sense, van Unnik goes deeper taking the successful evangelist who just left a high point in ministry out to the barren desert and suggesting God means it as a test of obedience. If van Unnik is correct, Philip meets the challenge albeit with a bit of prodding from the Spirit of the Lord. While it is possible that Fitzmyer and Conzelmann are correct and the wilderness road was just a road that was well-known to travelers, it would not be surprising for God to use a combination of all the possibilities in making happen God’s plan for the sharing of the good news and to let those with ears to hear and eyes to see discover what was there.

⁶⁶ Gage and Beck, “The Gospel, Zion’s Barren Woman and the Ethiopian Eunuch,” 37.

Candace

Acts 8:27 notes that the Ethiopian eunuch is “a court official of the Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, in charge of her entire treasury.” Candace was the title held by the queens of Ethiopia, not an individual queen’s name. Felicia Howell LaBoy lifts the significance of Luke’s use of this specific reference pointing out that this makes the eunuch

Most likely an official from the kingdom of Meroe, the seat of the Nubian government. This reference to Meroe and Nubia is most important because of its location and because of the kingdom’s military, commercial, and economic might. Almost a thousand miles south of the Egyptian coast, Nubia would have been understood by Luke’s authors as the “end of the world.”⁶⁷

In her book, *Symbolic Blackness and Ethnic Difference in Early Christian Literature*, Gay L. Byron goes deeper pointing out that: “The Ethiopian queens were in a constant battle with the Romans and other nations, from the early days of the empire when the general Gaius Petronius had led a military campaign against Candace’s army, up through the time when Nero planned but never executed a military campaign against Meroe.”⁶⁸ She goes on to suggest that Luke perhaps was intentionally “appealing to widely held assumptions about ethnic and cultural differences, as well as political and military realities in the first century, to demonstrate that Christianity could extend to cultural and political outsiders.”⁶⁹ Modern audiences reading this passage hear the name of a queen

⁶⁷ LaBoy, “You Want Me to Talk to Whom?,” 34.

⁶⁸ Gay L. Byron, *Symbolic Blackness and Ethnic Difference in Early Christian Literature* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2002), 111.

⁶⁹ Byron, *Symbolic Blackness and Ethnic Difference in Early Christian Literature*, 112.

that the Ethiopian serves while ancient audiences would hear a much deeper context full of power, conflict, and possibilities.

Baptism

The baptism of the eunuch is the climax of the story. The gospel message is shared and received, and it is at the request of the Ethiopian, not the urging of Philip that baptism occurs. Specific information regarding the liturgy Philip uses, questions the Ethiopian asks or Philip answers (aside from what is mentioned in verse thirty-seven), or whether Philip pours the water, sprinkles the water, or fully immerses the new Ethiopian believer is absent. These things that seem so important to modern day believers were not even important enough to address. The Ethiopian sees the water and asks, “What is to prevent me from being baptized?” (Acts 8:36). Failing to receive what he expected in Jerusalem, it is a fair question. Will his physical alterations exclude him from this church as it had the Temple? Will his skin color and culture exclude him? Will his sexuality, difference of sexuality, or lack of sexuality exclude him? Will his affluence, position, language, background, etc. exclude him? His experience to this point seemingly included marginalization and exclusion, why would he expect anything different now? Yet, the message of this Messiah that Philip proclaims brings hope and makes the Ethiopian long for baptism.

What is to prevent him? Nothing at all. God’s love and acceptance is open to all. God provides water at the opportune moment; the Ethiopian enters the healing, restoring, and transformative waters of baptism, and when he emerges walls are broken down. As Sean Burke says, “Who can be excluded from baptism once Philip, directed by the Holy

Spirit, has baptized the eunuch?”⁷⁰ Esau McCaulley emphasizes the impact the conversion of the Ethiopian has on the listening audience. He writes that “This story of Jesus crucified and risen drew the Ethiopian in and led him to be baptized. Again, this shows clearly that Africans are drawn to Christianity in much the same way as everyone else.”⁷¹ The story shows the early hearers that if the word of God can reach this exotic enigma of a person from the far corners of the earth, it can speak to all people.

Isaiah Chapter Fifty-Three

The scroll the Ethiopian is reading when Philip approaches the chariot is Isaiah, and the text quoted is from Isaiah chapter fifty-three, which is known as one of the Servant Songs. The scripture speaks of one who was “led to slaughter and like a lamb kept silent before its shearer” (Acts 8:32) which correlates to Isaiah 53:7. Isaiah 53:8 goes on to say, “By a perversion of justice he was taken away. Who could have imagined his future? For he was cut off from the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people” (Is. 53:8). Isaiah chapter fifty-three also includes references to this ‘servant’ as being “like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty...He was despised and rejected by others; a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity; and as one from whom others hide their faces he was despised, and we held him of no account” (Is. 53:2-3). Yet in verse ten, the scripture reveals, “Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him with pain, when you make his life an offering for sin, he shall see his offspring, and shall prolong his days.” (Is. 53:10). The servant who was slaughtered and was buried made his

⁷⁰ Burke, *Queering the Ethiopian Eunuch*, 138.

⁷¹ McCaulley, *Reading While Black*, 110.

life an offering for sin and yet would see his offspring and prolong his days? It is no wonder the Ethiopian in reading this was confused and needed some instruction.

In analyzing Isaiah chapter fifty-three, John L. McKenzie notes that in verse two, the “*root from dry ground* is the scrub growth of the desert.”⁷² Regarding verse three he notes, “to avert one’s gaze from pain and misfortune is a natural reaction; but in ancient belief it was dangerous to look at one who was an obvious object of divine anger.”⁷³ The servant in the scripture was a dry root, despised, and rejected. He was crushed and experienced pain. Many touchstones that would speak to the Ethiopian and draw him to seek a greater understanding of the passage exist. Gage and Beck lift the promise of offspring to the eunuch as they examine the outcome of Philip’s explanation of Isaiah chapter fifty-three and the good news of Jesus to the Ethiopian eunuch, writing:

But what was the eunuch to make of verse 10? In verse 8, we were told that Jesus died without descendants, so how could he ‘see his offspring’ and ‘prolong his days?’ The latter was clearly a promise of resurrection. Jesus ‘prolonged his days’ when he rose from the grave...As the Ethiopian eunuch came to faith, Jesus ‘saw his offspring.’ As Philip preached Jesus to him, the eunuch was born into the family of God.⁷⁴

The Ethiopian eunuch struggles to understand the scroll of the prophet on his own. God sees his struggle, knows Philip could provide the needed instruction, and sends an angel to direct him to the correct location. Through Philip’s instruction and their conversation, hope and healing occurs in the Ethiopian, and he is moved to faith and baptism. The

⁷² John L. McKenzie, *Second Isaiah, The Anchor Bible* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, 1968), 131.

⁷³ McKenzie, *Second Isaiah*, 131.

⁷⁴ Gage and Beck, “The Gospel, Zion’s Barren Woman and the Ethiopian Eunuch,” 38.

wounds and suffering he experienced in his own life made the message of Jesus' suffering and sacrifice even more meaningful.

Summary

God is at work in Acts 8:26-40. An Ethiopian official, whose identity only God knows, travels from a distant land to worship in God's holy city Jerusalem. He leaves with at least one scroll and many questions. God sees the Ethiopian traveler in his need and sends an angel to Philip who had the skills, understanding, and abilities to interact with the Ethiopian as well as the gift of sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ. The Angel of the Lord tells Philip where to go and when he should be there, and Philip goes willingly. At the appointed time, the chariot of the Ethiopian comes driving by, but Philip fails to immediately approach it. The Spirit of the Lord intervenes, instructs Philip to go and to join the chariot which just passed, and Philip obeys. The Ethiopian was reading about a suffering servant from the scroll of Isaiah and wants to better understand the meaning of the scripture. To whom does the prophet refer? What does he mean? What is the significance of this passage? Philip knows, offers to help, receives an invitation to join the chariot, and a conversation ensues that changes the Ethiopian's life.

The Ethiopian is a eunuch and treasurer for the queen. He is a man of great power and wealth, and yet, he yearns for something more. His yearning leads him on a search first to Jerusalem and then to the scroll of Isaiah, but he fails to find what he seeks. It took the witness and testimony of Philip as he explains the meaning of the scripture to begin to fill the need of the Ethiopian. He needs the healing love and salvation of Jesus. God knows the need present in the Ethiopian's heart and soul. God knows the aches,

wounds, and disappointments that he experienced and that lived on in him. God sees him as he is, accepts and loves him, and sends a healing balm for his soul. As Philip speaks, the Ethiopian recognizes the truth of what Philip says. Philip's words empowered by the Holy Spirit touch the part of the Ethiopian that is empty and wants more.

Jesus is the answer to his need, and baptism is the way to full acceptance of Jesus and acceptance into his family. The Ethiopian desires baptism and, even with the likelihood of rejection, requests it from Philip while also asking "What is to prevent me?" (Acts 8:36). Philip welcomes the Ethiopian into the baptismal waters and baptizes him. After baptism, the Spirit of the Lord takes Philip away to his next assignment. His task with this Ethiopian is complete. He uses the gifts and graces given by God to bring a new soul into God's Kingdom. The Ethiopian goes on his way filled with joy rejoicing in his newfound faith and life. He takes that faith back to his home and shares it with others establishing a church and bringing others to faith in Jesus thereby opening doors for their lives to be changed and their wounds to be healed.

At a time when the leaders of the new movement that would become Christianity focused on getting the message out to as many Jewish people as possible, God sends Philip to reach one person. At a time when the leaders focused on specific areas and towns, God sends Philip to the wilderness. At a time when there were specific and stringent rules for who could and could not worship and be included as one of God's people, God sends Philip to an Ethiopian eunuch to welcome him. At a time, the community came together following baptism, the Ethiopian continues on his way home and led by the Holy Spirit, creates a Christian community in a new area of the world with its own rules, traditions, and dynamics. This pericope has much to teach the church today.

Many traditional churches and mainline denominations are stuck in the mindset of doing what they know. A few decades ago, it was common for all the rooms in the church building to be in use on Sunday morning as Sunday school classes for all ages met learning and discussing the scriptures and ministries. Sanctuaries were full, and even small towns could support multiple churches. Many family and community events centered on the church, so it became a priority to those who were members. People found a place where they belonged. Their faith grew, and a family with similar views and goals surrounded them. Those still alive who remember this want the same for their children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren as well as the communities in which they live. They lament the loss of what they had, and many yearn to get it back.

Unfortunately, what has been forgotten or ignored was the harm done to many people who did not fit in or were not accepted. Harm was caused intentionally or unintentionally, and many left. Another thing that is often overlooked is the significant change in the culture in the United States. Since the decades of dynamic church attendance, work schedules and demands changed, family dynamics changed, the number of single parents, shared custody, and blended families rose, priorities changed, and, for many, the church stayed the same. God sent Philip to meet the Ethiopian where he was as he was. The Ethiopian had gone to ‘the church’ by going to Jerusalem to worship but had failed to receive what he needed.

How many people today yearn like the Ethiopian? How many are on a quest for explanation and understanding? The church is called to be there for them. This doctoral project seeks to discover some of the ways God has provided to reach people where they are. Technologies are available to address individual’s interests and needs. Possibilities

abound for churches to create and provide instruction, inspiration, and fellowship through technology which will allow believers and potential believers to ask questions, find answers, and delve more deeply into their faith. Doors can be opened for persons to invite in the Holy Spirit. Opportunities for baptism and community will follow as well as discipleship and mission possibilities. The Ethiopian found new life and shared it with others. It is time for the church to do the same.

CHAPTER THREE

HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS

Introduction

The final call of Christ to the disciples was to go out, teach, and baptize throughout the world. The Book of Acts tells how they began to carry out that charge through preaching, teaching, baptizing, and creating what became the Christian Church. In the modern era, many traditional Protestant churches are facing the reality of dropping membership and attendance numbers while also seeing a decline in financial giving, which affects the amount and type of ministry the church can do. For many of these churches, there is a wringing of hands and despair at the state of the church, but also no willingness to change their policies, practices, or structures to address the needs of new generations of believers. The tried and known takes precedence in many churches over the new and unknown. Yet, the call of Christ was not to find ways to get comfortable and stay in that comfortable place. The call was to go out, teach, and baptize. There were many times the disciples had to adapt to the area and peoples to whom they were sent, so that the people would be able to understand and embrace the forgiveness and salvation offered through Jesus. Throughout Christian history, there are examples of adaptation and change that brought about revival and energized believers of new generations. It is time for a new and different type of revival that will reach new, modern generations for Jesus Christ. If the church will create, adapt, and offer cutting-edge and innovative

technologies as tools for discipleship, it will empower younger generations to deepen their faith and live out Christian principles in their lives.

Since biblical times, each generation has borne the responsibility of sharing the Christian faith with others and passing the faith on to the next generation. They followed Jesus' call to the disciples to go into the world to teach and baptize new disciples. Some generations quietly went about the business of making disciples, while others were more forceful. In looking through the historical record, there is much to embrace and much to reject. In the midst of all the history, however, there are movements that stand out for the spirit and life-changing faith that took place. In looking forward to where God may be calling the next generation, it is helpful to look back and glean learnings from previous times of Christian growth.

The Second Great Awakening

The Second Great Awakening was a faith renewal and evangelism movement that began near the end of the eighteenth century and continued through the early nineteenth century. Specific dates for the movement vary, but this chapter focuses on the years 1790-1840. The end of the eighteenth century found the western world at the conclusion of the Age of Enlightenment and the beginning of the Industrial Revolution. By this time, in the United States the colonies had achieved their independence from England and started to put in place new systems of government while looking toward the future of the new nation. George Washington was president of the new United States, and the Constitution had just been ratified. The citizens of the new country were moving forward and feeling empowered to create new lifestyles, customs, traditions, and processes in

their new nation.¹ The former colonies featured a mixture of established cities, small towns, and frontier, and as the period continued, the country added more land with the Louisiana Purchase. The needs of those in cities differed in many ways from the needs of the settlers moving into the frontier. While the new government worked on how best to address the possibilities and challenges of the new United States, people in churches were feeling empowered and challenged as well.

Although people looking for religious freedom or those who were linked politically to the Church of England founded many of the colonies, the new nation began separating the churches from governmental control. The first separation was in those colonies linked to the Church of England, but as the years passed, each of the states put laws in place that would prevent the United States from being linked politically to one religion.² While this brought some newfound freedoms, the structure of the new nation also brought challenges to established churches and denominations. Understandably, some anxiety came with these changes, as religion in the way people had come to know it was changing, but there were also many opportunities that came from the new order of things. Rev. Lyman Beecher, one of many leaders during the Second Great Awakening, after Connecticut voted for separation of government and religion, said:

It was as dark a day as ever I saw...The injury done to the cause of Christ, as we then supposed, was irreparable. For several days I suffered what no tongue can tell for the best thing that ever happened to the State of Connecticut. It cut the

¹ Notably, although the new nation had as one of its foundational beliefs that “all men are created equal,” only a small fraction of those living in the United States had voting rights; indigenous peoples were not included, and slavery was endorsed with those who were enslaved having no rights.

² Daniel Walker Howe, *What God Hath Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848*, Oxford History of the United States (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, Inc., 2007), 164.

churches loose from dependence on state support. It threw them wholly on their own resources and on God.³

As the quote shows, Rev. Beecher's anxiety and despair soon gave way to joy as new possibilities for ministry and transformation became apparent. Procedures and customs that had become commonplace were now being set aside or reassessed in light of the new place religion had in society, and growth began to come as new ministries and ways to live into the Christian faith were explored. As Nathan Hatch explains in his book, *The Democratization of American Christianity*, "The Revolution dramatically expanded the circle of people who considered themselves capable of thinking for themselves about issues of freedom, equality, sovereignty, and representation. Respect for authority, tradition, station, and education eroded."⁴ People who had fought for freedom and liberty, or who now found themselves free, were unwilling to go back to anything that felt like bondage. The new nation was open for new realities, and the new government was only a start.

Ministers and other leaders of denominations and churches found themselves, like Lyman Beecher, facing a new world with new realities. The First Great Awakening in the American Colonies had lit a fire of faith in the people in the mid-1700s through the preaching and ministry of people like Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield. By 1790, most of that particular fire had burned down to calm embers, as churches and structures had been formed in its wake and had become normalized in society. What had been the reality of ministry growing out of the First Great Awakening was being pushed

³ Lyman Beecher, *Autobiography, Correspondence, Etc. of Lyman Beecher*, vol. 1 (Miami, FL: HardPress, 2017), locations 4342-4350, Kindle.

⁴ Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), locations 181-190, Kindle.

toward a new life, and the current ministers were being pushed to define new ways of reaching people and helping believers grow in faith.

Clergy Leaders

While the Second Great Awakening involved many clergypersons, some grew to prominence. Preachers and leaders such as Bishop Francis Asbury, Peter Cartwright, Lyman Beecher, Richard Allen, Charles Grandison Finney, Christian Newcomer, and John McGee were all instrumental in various aspects of the elements that would make up the Second Great Awakening. They each served in different ways according to their gifts and callings, and in doing so, they helped bring revitalization, growth, and change to Christianity in the new republic.

The Christmas Conference of 1784 established the Methodist Episcopal Church in America with Francis Asbury and Thomas Coke serving as superintendents (later called bishops) of the new church. The movement grew throughout the war and post-war years, and with the departure of the English clergy, meeting the needs of believers required the creation of a new structure. Elders and deacons were ordained, granted authority to preside over the sacraments, and given various appointments to current communities of faith as well as missionary areas. Preachers came from all levels of society and included men of little or no structured schooling. The ability to preach the gospel and having been called by God were the primary qualifications for leadership.⁵ As the new denomination worked in the new country, changes were made in various areas including worship, to be more applicable to the realities of life in the new United States and more comfortable for

⁵ Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity*, location 248, Kindle.

believers.⁶ Although Francis Asbury spearheaded the development of the new denomination, not everything ran smoothly for the new Methodist Episcopal Church, as disagreements became schisms and multiple new denominations were formed as a result during the years of the Second Great Awakening. By the time Francis Asbury died on March 31, 1816, not only was the Methodist Episcopal Church in America well established, but so were many of its off shoots that began to form or become established.

Peter Cartwright

Peter Cartwright was born September 1, 1785, in Virginia. His family moved to Kentucky while he was young. In his autobiography, he describes himself this way:

I was naturally a wild, wicked boy, and delighted in horse-racing, card-playing, and dancing...my mother often talked to me, wept over me, and prayed for me, and often drew tears from my eyes; and though I often wept under preaching, and resolved to do better and seek religion, yet I broke my vows, went into young company, rode races, played cards, and danced.⁷

He was converted in May 1801. He described his conversion as a true transformation and encounter with God, and that God gave him an assurance of forgiveness for his sins.

Peter joined the church in June 1801, and in 1802, the preacher of the circuit authorized him to be a preacher.⁸

Having moved to a new area of Kentucky, which did not have a circuit in the fall of 1802, he was given authority to form a circuit, preaching and ministering throughout the area. He organized and created the Livingston Circuit, and a presiding elder was

⁶ John G. McEllhenney, ed., *United Methodism in America: A Compact History* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1982), 46-47.

⁷ Peter Cartwright, *Autobiography of Peter Cartwright: The Backwoods Preacher* (1856; repr., Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing, LLC, 2010), locations 406-408, Kindle.

⁸ Cartwright, *Autobiography of Peter Cartwright*, locations 790-800, Kindle.

appointed to that circuit. He was then invited and accepted an invitation to travel with Lewis Garrett, who was appointed to the Cumberland Circuit.⁹ He was soon placed on that circuit to replace a pastor who retired. His autobiography describes the powerful movement of the Spirit through meetings and preaching, as well as the hardships faced by the circuit-riding preachers as they traveled through all kinds of weather and received very little in pay while trusting God for everything. He served various circuits in what are now Kentucky, Tennessee, Ohio, Indiana, and, eventually, Illinois. He also took part in camp meetings throughout the frontier of the United States. Camp Meetings were revivals held throughout the United States and will be described more fully later in this chapter.

Bishop Francis Asbury ordained Peter Cartwright in 1806.¹⁰ His experiences as a circuit rider influenced his opinions of the Methodists of the ‘modern day’ of 1856.

Reflecting on his time of service, he said:

Many nights, in early times, the itinerant had to camp out, without fire or food for man or beast. Our pocket Bible, Hymn Book, and Discipline constituted our library. It is true we could not, many of us, conjugate a verb or parse a sentence, and murdered the king's English almost every lick. But there was a Divine unction attended the word preached, and thousands fell under the mighty power of God, and thus the Methodist Episcopal Church was planted firmly in this western wilderness, and many glorious signs have followed, and will follow, to the end of time.¹¹

In contrast, Nathan Hatch summarizes Cartwright’s later opinions as he writes:

In his reflections on more modern times, Cartwright chafed at modern Methodists’ tendency to abandon simplicity for respectability and influence. He contrasted the early circuit rider’s ethic of sacrifice with younger ministers’ interest in college education and a respectable parish.

⁹ Cartwright, *Autobiography of Peter Cartwright*, locations 848-857, Kindle.

¹⁰ Cartwright, *Autobiography of Peter Cartwright*, location 1314, Kindle.

¹¹ Cartwright, *Autobiography of Peter Cartwright*, location 45, Kindle.

He lamented the fact that wealthy and fashionable Methodists were turning their back on exuberant revivals, intimate class meetings, and manifest concern for “the Lord’s poor.”¹²

Rev. Peter Cartwright followed God’s call into the circuit-riding preaching ministry, trusting God in every facet of that calling and in every trial he faced. Through his ministry, he shared the gospel throughout many areas of small, southern towns and frontier America, and lives were transformed.

Lyman Beecher

As mentioned earlier, Lyman Beecher—a Presbyterian minister—was firmly against separating the church from the state, seeing them as necessarily intertwined. As time passed, however, he was transformed by the possibilities present when the two entities were allowed to move and grow separately. Rev. Beecher became an active, empowering presence in the new voluntary church structure wherein people chose where and how to worship. He served pastorates from New England to Cincinnati, where his preaching and leadership called constituents to deeper belief in and practice of Christian virtues. His focus went beyond the pulpit and church walls to society in general, and he found many causes to herald and support throughout his ministry. Through his leadership, laity were called and empowered to act.¹³

One cause upon which he focused was Temperance. In his autobiography, Beecher wrote about the man whose drinking spurred him to action, “There was a neighborhood about four miles out called Bradleysville . . . The first time I went it was

¹² Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity*, location 3938, Kindle.

¹³ Howe, *What God Hath Wrought*, 166.

connected with a revival of religion, . . . and his wife became pious. He was nearly the first male convert I had after I went to Litchfield and was always most affectionate and kind.”¹⁴ After a certain amount of time, Rev. Beecher returned to the area and began the meetings again but learned that the man had returned to drinking. Rev. Beecher was compelled to write six sermons on intemperance which he preached to great effect in multiple places eventually having them printed. He described what happened by saying,

I began the next Sabbath, and continued as fast as I could write them—one every Sabbath, I think. I wrote under such a power of feeling as never before or since. Never could have written it under other circumstances. They took hold of the whole congregation. Sabbath after Sabbath the interest grew, and became the most absorbing thing ever heard of before.¹⁵

Rev. Beecher went on to call upon the faithful to stop purchasing alcohol and “to expel it from the world.”¹⁶ He stated, “These sermons made a racket all around, more than I had any idea they would. They stirred up the drinkers and all over the city . . . And from that commenced a series of efforts among my people and others in Boston to promote this reform.”¹⁷ He continued his efforts throughout his lifetime adding other societal needs and issues as he felt called.

Richard Allen

Richard Allen was born a slave. The Methodists brought him to Christianity, and at Allen’s request, his owner, Stokely Sturgis, allowed them to come preach to him and

¹⁴ Charles Beecher, ed., *Autobiography, Correspondence, Etc., of Lyman Beecher, D. D.*, vol. 2 (New York, NY: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1865), 34.

¹⁵ Beecher, *Autobiography, Correspondence, Etc.*, 35.

¹⁶ Beecher, *Autobiography, Correspondence, Etc.*, 35.

¹⁷ Beecher, *Autobiography, Correspondence, Etc.*, 78.

his family, which brought conversion to them as well.¹⁸ Upon becoming a Christian, Sturgis decided to allow Allen to work to pay for his freedom. After doing so, Allen became a free man in 1786. During this time, he became acquainted with Methodist Bishop Francis Asbury. They became friends as well as colleagues, and Bishop Asbury ordained Allen “as the first black Methodist deacon in 1799.”¹⁹ Allen founded Bethel Church in Philadelphia in 1794 after purchasing the land himself in 1791, and Bishop Asbury was present at its dedication.²⁰

Allen founded and created Bethel Church (also known as Mother Bethel) as the result of a walk out in protest of racist practices at St. George’s Methodist Church in Philadelphia. Richard Allen was among the Black members present at St. George’s Methodist Church on a Sunday when White members told them where they were allowed to sit instead of being able to select their own seats as in the past. During prayer, a trustee tried to make Rev. Absalom Jones get up from his knees and move, telling him he could not kneel in prayer there. The trustee caused such a stir and was so offensive, as were others he called in to help, that Rev. Allen writes, “By this time prayer was over, and we all went out of the church in a body, and they were no more plagued with us in the church.”²¹

¹⁸ Howe, *What God Hath Wrought*, 182.

¹⁹ Richard S. Newman, *Freedom’s Prophet: Bishop Richard Allen, the AME Church, and the Black Founding Fathers* (New York, NY: NYU Press, 2008), location 48, Kindle.

²⁰ Newman, *Freedom’s Prophet*, location 2, Kindle.

²¹ Richard Allen, *The Life, Experience, and Gospel Labours of the Rt. Rev. Richard Allen* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2008), location 134, Kindle.

Russell E. Richey, Kenneth E. Rowe, and Jean Miller Schmidt, eds., *The Methodist Experience in America*, vol. 2, *A Sourcebook*, (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2000), 118.

As Richard S. Newman describes in his book, *Freedom's Prophet: Bishop*

Richard Allen, the AME Church, and the Black Founding Fathers:

In Mother Bethel, Allen built a physical edifice that defined African American Christianity and black autonomy for years to come...Here, ideas preceded bricks and mortar, for before Allen literally built his church in the 1790s he envisioned an autonomous black religious institution where none had previously existed...Allen bought an old blacksmith shop and hauled it to Bethel's present location...Allen crafted a pulpit, arranged the pews, and whitewashed the walls of his new church. After being inaugurated in July 1794, Bethel Church, as it was soon known, became identified with black abolitionism and the dream of black redemption.²²

Through Bethel Church and then through the African Methodist Episcopal Church—which elected Richard Allen bishop after splitting from the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1816—Bishop Allen led believers in the fight against slavery.²³ Bishop Allen also led believers in assisting others during the yellow fever epidemic and established other ministries while also forming a solid community for African American believers. He continues to be raised up as an inspiration and example for civil and social holiness and justice.

Charles Grandison Finney

Charles Grandison Finney was a Presbyterian minister and revivalist. He also led Oberlin College in Ohio for many years and was a staunch abolitionist. Finney came to Christianity through a powerful conversion experience on October 10, 1821. This experience was so transforming, in fact, that immediately after, he left his job as a lawyer

²² Newman, *Freedom's Prophet*, 14.

²³ Jason E. Vickers, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to American Methodism* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 56.

and became an evangelist for God.²⁴ He focused on reviving believers and the church and converting sinners to Christ. He was convinced that revival was a necessary part of expanding the Christian religion. He stated in his *Lectures on Revivals of Religion*, “It is altogether improbable that religion will ever make progress among heathen nations except through the influence of revivals.”²⁵ Finney’s efforts created a structure and intentional plan for revival that persons could analyze and implement anywhere, but he was quick to point out that revivals do not happen “without the blessing of God.”²⁶ By his account, revival is not a miracle, but the use of the means God has given to bring people close to God and to reveal God to them. When God blesses this effort, nothing can stop it.²⁷

Charles Finney traveled extensively throughout the new United States and also in England and Wales, preaching and exhorting believers to practice their faith through serving those in need.²⁸ He moved to Oberlin, Ohio in 1835 to teach, and then became president at Oberlin College in 1851. Oberlin became his home, and he remained based there for the rest of his life.²⁹ Oberlin was a stop on the Underground Railroad and provided an opportunity for Rev. Finney to push forward the abolitionist cause with actual action and not just words.

²⁴ Howe, *What God Hath Wrought*, 170-171.

²⁵ Charles G. Finney, *Lectures on Revivals of Religion* (New York, NY: Fleming H. Revell Company, 2010), location 3, Kindle.

²⁶ Edwin Scott Gaustad, ed., *A Documentary History of Religion in America: To the Civil War* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1982), 337.

²⁷ Finney, *Lectures on Revivals of Religion*, location 3-5, Kindle.

²⁸ Howe, *What God Hath Wrought*, 173.

²⁹ Howe, *What God Hath Wrought*, 174-175.

It is important to note here that, for Finney and most other White abolitionists, the end of slavery did not translate into equal status in society. According to Jemar Tisby, “Finney and many others like him believed that social change came about through evangelization. According to this logic, once a person believed in Christ as Savior and Lord, he or she would naturally work toward justice and change.”³⁰

Christian Newcomer

Christian Newcomer was part of the United Brethren in Christ and was one of its early leaders, preaching and serving in Pennsylvania, Maryland, Ohio, and surrounding areas. Philip William Otterbein ordained Newcomer on October 2, 1813.³¹ Newcomer was elected bishop the same year, before presiding over the first United Brethren General Conference in 1815.³² He was a circuit-riding preacher who traveled extensively throughout the year, evangelizing as he went. Excerpts from his journal show that he would preach in either German or English, depending on the day and community gathered, and that the people were moved by the message. His journal reads, “Sunday [August 22, 1813] – At night I preached again at John Buck’s; here we again had a soul-reviving meeting; nearly every person present melted into tears; some cried for mercy; others shouted and praised God.”³³ Through his ministry and the ministry of his

³⁰ Jemar Tisby, *The Color of Compromise: The Truth About the American Church’s Complicity in Racism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2019), locations 68-69, Kindle.

³¹ McEllhenney, *United Methodism in America*, 54.

³² McEllhenney, *United Methodism in America*, 54-55.

³³ Richey, Rowe, and Schmidt, *A Sourcebook*, 186.

colleagues, the denomination became established, determined its polity and direction, and grew—adding about 37,000 new members from 1813 through 1850.³⁴

John McGee

John McGee was a key leader of the revival movement during the Second Great Awakening, especially on the frontier and in the Camp Meeting Movement. He was a Methodist minister born in 1763 in North Carolina and raised Presbyterian. He converted to Methodism in the mid-1780s and felt called to ministry.³⁵ In 1788, he was given probationary status, and in 1789, he served as a circuit rider with Rev. Daniel Asbury (no relation to Bishop Francis Asbury), reporting great success.³⁶ He served circuits in Maryland and North Carolina, and was then appointed to a charge in Tennessee after he married. From there, he preached, toured, and served as district superintendent.

His greatest contribution, though, may have been in the Great Revival that built on the Camp Meeting Movement. John McGee was, if not a creator, at least present and active from the earliest stages of the Great Revival.³⁷ He and his brother William traveled throughout the frontier, preaching at camp meetings, and bringing about a revival among the people. Descriptions of many of his services include people being overwhelmed by

³⁴ Vickers, *The Cambridge Companion to American Methodism*, 66.

³⁵ Kenneth O. Brown, *Holy Ground: A Study of the American Camp Meeting* (New York, NY: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1992), 12.

³⁶ Brown, *Holy Ground*, 14.

³⁷ The most popular tradition attributes the spark of the movement to the work of Reverend James McGready and has much to commend it, but Brown gives a number of primary sources to support McGee's work and contributions. Brown, *Holy Ground*, 17.

the Spirit, with many shouting and falling to the floor.³⁸ Untold numbers of people were convicted of sin and brought to believe in Jesus as their Savior during this period of revival, and it was John McGee who was instrumental in fanning the flames and keeping the fire of revival going.

Life and Culture in the Early United States

The clergymen listed served in various areas of the country that had established cities, small towns, rural areas, and frontier that was just being explored and settled. Needs in the areas differed and yet often overlapped, as did the clergy who were called to serve. Denominations often cooperated with each other, and clergy support and friendships were found cross-denominationally. Even when divisions occurred and new churches were established, great respect was often still held for colleagues from each side.

Many cities in the East had been established in colonial times and became built up into densely populated areas with divisions between the wealthy, trade classes, laborers, and the poor. Slaves would have their own quarters provided by the masters, who would have their own definition of what would count as appropriate board and lodging. Southern cities differed from northern cities not only in the prevalence and acceptability of slavery, but in culture as well. Cities had the benefit of more access to medical and other professional care than most small towns and rural areas. All of those areas were much more equipped than the frontier, where settlers were breaking new ground and

³⁸ Brown, *Holy Ground*, 18.

trying to establish homes on land that may or may not have still been claimed by native peoples.

Rarely would someone in Boston observe a group of citizens squaring off with a group of indigenous people over use of and access to the land, but this issue commonly faced those in the frontier areas of the United States at the time. The lack of understanding and respect shown to the native peoples by the government—and the lack of respect from the government to its own citizens who went to settle the land—resulted in a great deal of bloodshed and pain. These realities affected the religious needs and outlook of the people at the time and continue to have ramifications in the world today. Preachers going into these areas faced not only religious challenges, but also life-or-death challenges that were much different than those faced in a small town, where the biggest challenge for a new preacher might be gaining the trust of the residents.

Preachers, their families, and laity in ministry took the time to know and understand the needs of the various communities to meet those needs in ways that would bring the people closer to Jesus Christ and bring about a fresh awakening of the Holy Spirit in the new country. The traditional definition of church did not bind leaders of the movement. They were ready to use the empowerment they had been given by God and move forward to make Christianity a living and breathing force in the new America.

Laity

While clergymen were a large impetus behind the revival of faith and evangelization during the Second Great Awakening, laity conceived, spurred on, and carried out many of the ideas and movements. At the time of the Second Great

Awakening, it was very rare for a woman to be certified to preach, let alone ordained or credentialed. However, many women preached anyway and made a great deal of difference to those who would listen. Critics took Charles Grandison Finney to task for allowing women to preach, and it is well-known that Bishop Richard Allen—after denying permission—wholeheartedly affirmed the preaching gifts of Jarena Lee after hearing her speak.³⁹ Active Christian believers embraced the ideals of the nation and looked for ways they could actively bring Christian beliefs and values to everyone in the land. This was a new call and a new empowerment since—as mentioned earlier—up until this time, for most of them religion had been linked with the state. In the new order of things, not only were individuals free, but their religion was free and they could follow the leading of the Holy Spirit to deepen the faith of those who already believed, call on established churches to live more actively into the call of faith and social justice issues, and move forward to bring salvation to those who had not heard or accepted Jesus Christ as their Savior and repented of their sins.

Christians at the time took this very seriously, and the country was changed because of it. Women as well as men were involved, and often the women were the powerhouses of the movements. Women were determined organizers at the time who were intent on addressing the needs of all people in society so that they could be brought to salvation through Jesus Christ. As Daniel Walker Howe describes, “Not only did women organize the religious and benevolent activities that surrounded and followed the

³⁹ Howe, *What God Hath Wrought*, 172.

[Finney] revivals, they participated in the actual meetings, sometimes speaking and praying in public.”⁴⁰

Religious and Social Justice Movements

Sunday School, Publishing, and Tract Societies

One of the movements that started just before this time was the Sunday School Movement. Brought to America from England, it worked well. This movement started in the cities of the East and then expanded to the frontier as it became clear that Sunday school was a useful tool for deepening the faith. Edwin Gaustad in his book, *A Religious History of America*, writes:

Where ministers were scarce, teachers few, schools scattered, and libraries absent, the school for Sunday scholars—youth and adult—performed a vital function. Requiring no ordained clergy, no sacramental or liturgical authority, Sunday Schools were generally managed by the laity. And as their enrollments grew, the demand for literature also increased.⁴¹

In 1824, the American Sunday School Union lifted up the benefits and successes of the Sunday School Movement, highlighting its impact on literacy.⁴² In the same article, published in *The American Sunday School Magazine* in July 1824, the Union made its future vision clear. The ‘Sabbath schools’ would be a more effective Christian force for good if they were united together. The Union would provide resources and materials and connect the teachers as one unit, which would support them in their efforts even though

⁴⁰ Howe, *What God Hath Wrought*, 172.

⁴¹ Edwin Scott Gaustad, *A Religious History of America* (New York, NY: Harper and Row, 1974), 169.

⁴² Gaustad, *A Documentary History of Religion in America*, 330.

they were scattered throughout the country. They would publish materials that would uplift and unite the Sunday schools in their endeavors to lift the name of Jesus Christ and bring others into the faith with enthusiasm and commitment.⁴³

The Sunday School Movement gave greater importance and incentive to the Tract Societies and the denominational publishing houses. Publishing houses began creating more resources that churches could use to share the gospel in classes for both children and adults. The Tract Societies added to their publications and multiplied their calls for the distribution of their staple Christian Tracts, as written in this section from *The American Tract Society Documents, 1824-1925*:

Next to the Bible and the living Ministry, one of these means of light and salvation will be found to be, short, plain, striking, entertaining, and instructive *Tracts*, exhibiting in writing some of the great and glorious truths of the Gospel...A tract may be perused at leisure; it may be consulted in the hour of retirement and solitude; it can be read in a little time; and...may be easily deposited and weighed in the memory.⁴⁴

Circuit Riders

To meet the needs of widespread settlers, denominations began to expand and embrace circuit-riding ministry. As mentioned earlier, Rev. Peter Cartwright was one of the Methodist circuit riders, but there were many others. As Edwin Gaustad describes in *A Documentary History of Religion in America: To the Civil War*, “Even before a hamlet or village was formed, the Methodist traveling preacher...would be on hand to instruct, baptize, convert, marry the betrothed, bury the dead. Such ministrations made life on the frontier more bearable, though life for the circuit-rider himself often seemed scarcely

⁴³ Gaustad, *A Documentary History of Religion in America*, 331.

⁴⁴ Gaustad, *A Documentary History of Religion in America*, 332.

so.”⁴⁵ The ministers brought a sense of civilization with them to the frontier and widespread settlements and urged people to hold fast to their Christian beliefs or repent from a fallen state and revive their faith for the betterment of the society they were building.

Circuit riders traveled great distances and often worked with the Tract Societies to provide resources for the charges on the circuits. With many circuit riders traveling hundreds of miles on a single circuit, it was a hard life. Although intentionally appointed to circuits and supposed to have a certain salary, they had to trust wholly in the Lord for provision as they were often not paid.⁴⁶ The preachers were nevertheless faithful in their commitments, and because of their ministries and the work of the Holy Spirit in the midst of the people, faith took hold and believers were awakened to more work that needed to be done for the Kingdom and for society in general.

Abolitionists

One such need was the abolition of slavery that many felt should have been abolished when the country was formed. While many White citizens supported the abolition of slavery, especially those living in the North, the real impetus and force came from African Americans, many of whom had experienced slavery themselves. As Jason E. Vickers points out in *The Cambridge Companion to American Methodism*,

A number of escaped slaves, such as Sojourner Truth, Frederick Douglass, Harriet Tubman, and the Rev. (later Bishop) Jermain Loguen (all AMEZ), used explicitly religious rationales to protest slavery via various means—preaching, public

⁴⁵ Gaustad, *A Documentary History of Religion in America*, 388.

⁴⁶ For detailed stories of a circuit-riding preacher, read Peter Cartwright’s autobiography.

speaking, political activism, and conducting fugitives on the underground railroad.⁴⁷

As the movement grew, more people were added to the cause and more churches participated, but they also faced angry opposition from many slave holders, churches in the South, and others who wanted the system of slavery to continue to exist. The abolitionists continued undaunted even in the face of growing violence and mixed messages from denominations. The bishops of the Methodist Episcopal Church wrote a letter in 1800 supporting the cause, and yet, the Methodist Episcopal Church General Conferences of 1836 and 1840 censured delegates for their arguments pushing for anti-slavery legislation.⁴⁸ The American Anti-Slavery Society formed in 1833 and drew support from people of various denominations working for the cause.

The Black churches were not only leaders in the call to abolish slavery, but they also provided a safe community of care and support for people of color to grow in faith and as citizens. Although legend and a view of the stories of that time through rose-colored glasses lift up the North as a bastion of freedom for all people of color, while making the South and its policies surrounding slavery the pit of hell, people of color faced prejudice and challenges to their freedoms everywhere in the nation. The church provided both a refuge and a rallying point for communities of color and began a legacy that continues to this day. The denominations formed in response to the belittling, bigotry, and rejection found in their former churches became just as active in moving forward the cause of Christ through societal change as their White counterparts, while also addressing specific needs of their own congregations' members and neighborhoods.

⁴⁷ Vickers, *The Cambridge Companion to American Methodism*, 72.

⁴⁸ McEllhenney, *United Methodism in America*, 55.

Temperance

In addition to slavery, another great sin of the land—in the opinion of reformers and revivalists—was the amount of alcohol being consumed by the population and the growing cases of drunkenness. Daniel Walker Howe gives some referential data in the following passage:

For centuries, alcohol had mitigated hardship, cold, and pain, helped celebrate harvests and festivals, and provided periodic relief from hard work. Along with the comforts of alcohol went its abuse and the toleration of its abuse. Americans in the early nineteenth century quaffed alcohol in prodigious quantities. In 1825, the average American over fifteen years of age consumed seven gallons of alcohol a year, mostly in the form of whiskey and hard cider. (The corresponding figure at the start of the twenty-first century was less than two gallons, most of it from beer and wine.) Workers typically took a midmorning break and a midafternoon break, both accompanied by alcohol, as well as liquor with every meal. To entertain guests meant to ply them with several kinds of alcohol until some fell down. All social classes drank heavily; college students, journeyman printers, agricultural laborers, and canal-diggers were especially notorious. Schoolchildren might face an inebriated teacher in the classroom. Although socially tolerated, drunkenness frequently generated violence, especially domestic violence, and other illegal behavior.⁴⁹

People of all races and all social rankings from the highest class to the lowest supported the cause of temperance. The American Temperance Society was another foundation created that crossed denominations to provide a way for likeminded individuals and groups to work together to achieve their goals. This society was one of the more successful movements and laid the groundwork that other causes would use as an example as they began their own efforts.

⁴⁹ Howe, *What God Hath Wrought*, 166-167.

Camp Meetings

The movement most widely associated with the Second Great Awakening is the Camp Meeting Movement that brought religious revival not only to the frontier, as most commonly reported, but also throughout the country. Camp meetings built on the foundations and traditions of such events as Methodist Quarterly meetings and Presbyterian Sacramental Occasions. Preachers and laity built on these events and expanded the idea, creating a new experience that soon took hold and grew in popularity and success. The name ‘camp meetings’ grew out of the practice of camping at the site where the meeting or revival took place. As the meetings evolved, it became common for tent villages to be erected, and in some places, where meetings and campgrounds became more established, cottages and other buildings were erected to house the believers and seekers who would arrive.

The most well-known camp meetings were held during the Great Revival from 1787-1805, with Cane Ridge, Kentucky being the best known after having an estimated 30,000 to 100,000 people in attendance.⁵⁰ They were multi-day events that featured services, preaching, exhorting, singing, and prayer throughout the day, with more focused and intensely spirit-filled services in the evening that always featured altar calls. The goal of each camp meeting was to bring sinners to repentance and to awaken those who had fallen away from the faith. Everything else was secondary.

In pursuit of that goal, it was common to find preachers of various denominations working together and sharing preaching duties, sometimes at the same time. Laity often spoke by sharing testimonies and calling sinners to repentance. Black preachers and laity

⁵⁰ Brown, *Holy Ground*, vii.

also participated, but with various degrees of inclusion depending on the location of the camp meeting and who was in charge. While there are records of Black preachers and laity being a key part of the proceedings, many times—if not most of the time—there was a separate Black camp meeting going on at the same time in the same campground.

Converts were known to stand up in the meeting area, testify to what God had just done for them, and call others to find salvation. Believers worked in community to bring people into God's Kingdom. Although some in the church criticized the camp meetings for their lack of structure, there actually was a plan and structure to most events. The issue was that the plan and structure differed from traditional practice. Each day had a schedule, but it allowed the Holy Spirit to work in and among the people gathered, with those moved to speak having space to do so, and those experiencing transformation or repentance being given the time, space, and support to allow God to work in them.

United Methodism in America: A Compact History describes the four stages of the conversion experience:

First, the prospect became convinced of his or her guilt as a sinner. *Second*, there was a feeling of despair; the sinner deserved God's wrathful punishment. *Third*, there was hope. God was gracious...*Finally*, there was an experience of assurance. Guilt, despair, and hope gave way to the joy of salvation experienced in the sinner's life. This type of conversion was the goal of the revival and the camp meeting.⁵¹

With this as their guide, preachers would focus on calling out sinful behaviors and convicting those present of their need for repentance and reform. They would remind them of the judgments of God and what was to come. The hymns and songs sung would also reinforce the messages of the preaching. The song leaders would use hymns from the

⁵¹ McEllhenney, *United Methodism in America*, 69.

churches as well as spirituals. Daniel Walker Howe describes how various musical traditions and forms would be used during the gatherings. He writes:

Preachers at camp meetings, of either race, might chant their sermons, punctuated with cries from the congregation: “Amen!” “Hallelujah!” “Lord, have mercy!”...From the European tradition came the practice of “lining out” the psalms...The practice dovetailed readily with the “call-and-response” pattern of African music. It suited a society possessing more singers than hymnbooks—and where not everyone could read music or words...American Christians drew inspiration from...Charles Wesley and Isaac Watts. But the extraordinary creativity of the Second Great Awakening also stimulated the production of American folk music of unparalleled power: the black spirituals and the gospel music of both races.⁵²

By combining preaching, singing, exhorting, etc., it was the prayer of those involved that the Holy Spirit would move among them and do a great work, and—according to all accounts of the time—that is what happened. Camp meeting conversions brought new believers into the faith and led to the establishment of churches to keep them in the faith.

Kenneth O. Brown, in his book *Holy Ground: A Study of the American Camp Meeting*, shares an account of a camp meeting that continues to have impact to this day. In 1794, the Grassy Branch Revival in North Carolina planned in advance for the crowds they expected. Rev. Daniel Asbury was in charge with a team of others. This was one of the earliest revivals, where camping out was intentionally planned with stands and tents built for the occasion. It marked a turning point that continued with the movement. One feature of the Grassy Branch Revival was the Black camp meeting to which the many slaves who attended accompanied their owners. The Black camp meeting continued to grow and—following the Civil War and Emancipation—Mary E. Tucker gave the land to the camp trustees in 1879. It is currently Tucker’s Grove Camp Meeting near Machpelah,

⁵² Howe, *What God Hath Wrought*, 185.

North Carolina, and the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church has run it since 1876.⁵³

The camp meetings did bring great growth and expansion, especially among Methodists and Baptists. Ruth writes that “In 1800 Methodists reported 64,894 members: in 1810, 174,560. It is estimated that by 1811 Methodists were conducting 400 to 500 camp meetings annually, attracting around 1 million participants.”⁵⁴ Although the revivals succeeded in bringing people to repentance and building the church, not everyone agreed that this was an appropriate way of introducing believers to Christianity or bringing them into the fold. Presbyterians, who were among the earliest leaders of the movement, soon found themselves at odds with each other, with some leaving the church or being forcibly removed.⁵⁵ Traditionalists were especially opposed to the emotional atmosphere used to bring about conversions, even calling it “immoral and irreligious.”⁵⁶ Theologians also criticized them, with “John Nevin, [a theology professor]...contend[ing] that the revival format constituted a distinct religious form that was harmful to true religion...The spirit of the *Anxious Bench* is at war with the spirit of the Catechism.”⁵⁷

⁵³ Brown, *Holy Ground*, 8-9.

⁵⁴ Ruth, “Reconsidering the Emergence of the Second Great Awakening,” 337.

⁵⁵ Dickson D. Bruce Jr., *And They All Sang Hallelujah: Plain Folk Camp-Meeting Religion, 1800-1845* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1974), 52.

⁵⁶ Bruce Jr., *And They All Sang Hallelujah*, 54.

⁵⁷ Vickers, *The Cambridge Companion to American Methodism*, 130.

Conclusion

The Second Great Awakening was a time of taking chances and being willing to try new things. People were hopeful and felt empowered after winning the Revolutionary War. They had a new constitution, new government, and new lands to explore. Although the country failed to fully realize its declaration that ‘all men were created equal’ and had ‘inalienable rights,’ the idea had been planted in the minds of the people, and they were ready to pursue their dreams. After their release from any state control, Christians felt an even deeper call to exercise their newfound religious freedom in ways that would energize and expand God’s church, thereby bringing Christ to all. They used this freedom to create movements and actively pursue causes to implement Christian ideals in the world. There were pros and cons to these movements, and many times the churches and volunteers fell short, but they did move out and try. Their efforts brought others to the faith and laid foundations that would inspire and energize generations to follow.

The coming generations and the current church need an infusion of the hope and empowerment felt by these early Americans. In order to reach new people and new generations for Christ, it is vital that the church be open to listening to the Holy Spirit’s leading and to actively pursuing many areas of service, ministry, and faithful practice—even when it means changing the way in which the church does things. Young believers look to the older generations for guidance, and older generations must also look to young believers for guidance on where the Holy Spirit is at work kindling fires and preparing the next Great Revival and Awakening to God’s presence among us.

CHAPTER FOUR

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

Introduction

Jesus calls on and commissions the disciples to go throughout the world making disciples, teaching, and baptizing in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Mt. 28:19). In the first chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, Jesus instructs the disciples to wait in Jerusalem for the coming of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4-5). He then tells them that they would receive power when the Holy Spirit comes and be his witnesses locally and throughout the world (Acts 1:8). As Philip interacts with the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26-40), the Holy Spirit (Spirit of the Lord) is a key part of the story moving the action forward while guiding and directing Philip's actions. During the Second Great Awakening, the movement of the Holy Spirit was acknowledged as the catalyst for conversions and social justice ministries that grew in strength throughout the era.

The church came into being through the urgings and empowerment of the Holy Spirit. Mainline traditional churches in the United States today would benefit from being open to the movement of the Holy Spirit in their churches. In too many long-established congregations and denominations, the movement of the Holy Spirit became history that was stored away in a closet with the archives. As the church grew and aged, it found the structures and procedures that worked for them and kept those activities, processes, and expectations even as times changed and the world around them moved forward. In many

cases, the traditions of the church became sacrosanct and those wanting to make changes or to not follow the established calendar were often rejected or left out. Congregations still living with a twentieth century mindset often find themselves with shrinking membership and attendance. For such congregations, the people they are called to serve changed; the world around them changed; the culture changed; the lifestyles of families changed; and the demands on people changed. Yet the church often entrenched itself in expectations and demands of the past declaring that God fails to change and bemoaning the lack of faith of newer generations.

The Holy Spirit, however, still lives and moves thereby calling people of faith to embrace and live out the teachings of Jesus in many and varied ways. The Holy Spirit still calls people to do new things. The Holy Spirit stills energizes the faithful who are willing and open to hear and answer the call. Although the Holy Spirit perhaps spent decades being stored away with the archives, it only takes an invitation for the Holy Spirit to make itself known and bring a new vision and new life to God's church. God continuously provides new and better ways to reach people with God's love and to bring them to faith. New tools are given that persons can use to speak to people's hearts and minds, and to touch their souls. If the church would open itself to embrace new technologies and find ways it can use to deepen people's faith and grow practices of discipleship, it will find itself in a new and exciting time of life and revival. Those who are dismayed at the current dwindling of attendance and lack of volunteers in traditional church structures will find themselves buoyed by the new life and fresh breath of energy the Holy Spirit brings in new and different ways. Faith and discipleship were not lost, they are just looking for a new outlet and form.

For the church of today to reach new generations of people and bring them to deeper belief and discipleship, the church must acknowledge and welcome the movement of the Holy Spirit. This chapter examines the person of the Holy Spirit and the role the Holy Spirit plays in the Godhead of the Trinity by examining scripture and the writings of various theologians and scholars. This chapter will consider how the Holy Spirit is known in traditional mainline churches and how that understanding affects the church and its ministries. The movement of the Holy Spirit in bringing renewal and rejuvenation will be the final section of discovery. The Holy Spirit has been at work constantly throughout time. It is important that the church open itself to rediscover the Holy Spirit in its midst and see how the church can be moved forward to follow its call to share the good news and make disciples of all nations.

The Holy Spirit in the Trinity

The Christian church worships one God in three persons fittingly referred to as the Trinity. From the earliest centuries of the church, theologians, and other church leaders identified how this Trinity works together as the God revealed to Christians. The early creeds of the church attempted to put these beliefs in understandable and declarative statements that would bring believers together by clarifying what exactly this new movement believed. Trying to make something beyond human understanding comprehensible was and remains a daunting task, but many took up the challenge debating the known and the implied, accepting or rejecting ideas posited by others, and putting into words what boggled the mind but spoke to the soul.

In explaining and defining the Trinity, it became vital to make clear that all parts of the Godhead were equal and eternal, not a hierarchy with one person of the Godhead created by another. This was not a trinity of gods as known by the Greeks and Romans. There was one God manifesting in three persons and that God was the creator of all that was made including human beings. The God of creation interacted with all of creation and especially humanity throughout time, came to earth in the form of a human being—living, dying, and rising again—and sent the Holy Spirit to lead, direct, and infuse believers with God’s love thereby bringing them into the bonds of love shared by the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. At times, this chapter uses the designations Father and Son to describe two persons of the Trinity because most of the references use that terminology. Human definitions of gender, however, fail to bind the persons of the Trinity. Augustine writes that,

The Trinity, one God, of whom are all things, through whom are all things, in whom are all things. Thus the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, and each of these by Himself, is God, and at the same time they are all one God; and each of them by Himself is a complete substance, and yet they are all one substance. The Father is not the Son nor the Holy Spirit; the Son is not the Father nor the Holy Spirit; the Holy Spirit is not the Father nor the Son: but the Father is only Father, the Son is only Son, and the Holy Spirit is only Holy Spirit. To all three belong the same eternity, the same unchangeableness, the same majesty, the same power. In the Father is unity, in the Son equality, in the Holy Spirit the harmony of unity and equality; and these three attributes are all one because of the Father, all equal because of the Son, and all harmonious because of the Holy Spirit.¹

¹ Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, ed. Philip Schaff (Buffalo, NY: The Christian Literature Company, 1887), location 363, Kindle.

In the book *Holy Spirit* written by Stanley Hauerwas and Will Willimon, they point out that Augustine was “often regarded as the origin of the Western tradition.”² Although in the quote above, Augustine explains the equality of the three persons of the Trinity, Hauerwas and Willimon go on to say that “Augustine allegedly emphasized the unity of the three persons of the Trinity in a manner that made it difficult to know the distinct role of each person of the Trinity.”³ They point out that in practice, Western theologians focused much more on the Father and Son than on the Holy Spirit. Hauerwas and Willimon call out that lack of attention, especially regarding the Son, saying, “Yet isolation of the Spirit from the Son is a mistake. One of the fundamental tasks of the Holy Spirit is to rest on the Son. Pneumatology...and Christology...are interrelated, making any attempt to treat one without the other a breeding ground for heresies that say too much or too little for the Holy Spirit.”⁴ They go on to point out that, “the interrelation of the persons of the Trinity means that everything said about the Holy Spirit also ought to be said about the Father and the Son.”⁵ In addition, they wrote that “the doctrine of the Trinity is a discovery that the church has made to keep us from leaving out any part of the story of God’s care of creation through the calling into existence of a people called the church.”⁶

² Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon, *The Holy Spirit* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2015), 5.

³ Hauerwas and Willimon, *The Holy Spirit*, 5.

⁴ Hauerwas and Willimon, *The Holy Spirit*, 6.

⁵ Hauerwas and Willimon, *The Holy Spirit*, 10-11.

⁶ Hauerwas and Willimon, *The Holy Spirit*, 11.

In addressing the role and importance of the Holy Spirit in the Trinity, theologian Sarah Coakley states, “the Holy Spirit is intrinsic to the very make-up of the Father-Son relationship from all eternity; the Spirit, moreover, is that without which there would be no incarnated Son at all, and – by extension – no life of Sonship into which we, too, might enter by participation.”⁷ A focus on only two-thirds of the Trinity leaves out a key portion of the function of God. Each person of the Trinity has a role to play and each always works connected with the others. Separating one and ignoring or only giving lip service to one’s presence diminishes the understanding of the whole and thereby limits the power of the church to follow the call of God in mission to the world.

Stephen Kaung, translator of Watchman Nee’s messages compiled in the book *The Communion of the Holy Spirit*, introduces the volume in the Translator’s Preface by saying,

We as Christians come to know the fullness of the Godhead through the love, the grace and the communion which proceed from the triune God. It is the love of God the Father that purposes all. It is the grace of God the Son that provides all. And it is the communion of God the Spirit that performs all. Love, grace, and communion are all equally essential. What would love be without grace? It would have no expression. What would grace be without communion? It would be unattainable.⁸

Although written by the translator, this statement summarizes Nee’s theology as put forth in the book. Each person of the Trinity has an active and vital role to play in the Godhead, and the reality and purpose of God would not be realized if any part were missing or did not fulfill its mission. In the book *The Holy Spirit and Ch’I (Qi): A*

⁷ Sarah Coakley, *God, Sexuality, and the Self* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 56.

⁸ Watchman Nee, *The Communion of the Holy Spirit*, ed. Herbert L. Fader, trans. Stephen Kuang (New York, NY: Christian Fellowship Publishers, Inc., 2014), 6.

Chiological Approach to Pneumatology, Koo Dong Yun notes that both Barth and Augustine “understood the Spirit as the bond between the Father and the Son... This Holy Spirit is also active, and it unites the Father and Son. The Spirit is also the love that unites the Father and the Son.”⁹ Hauerwas and Willimon focus on love as that which binds the three persons of the Trinity, not as the role of one specific person.¹⁰ Although Barth and Augustine include a description of the Holy Spirit as being active as well as being the love that unites, readers need to be wary of defining the Holy Spirit as just a feeling of love that sweeps over and into people. The love brought by the Holy Spirit is dynamic and world changing. The Holy Spirit is the very life’s breath of the church, showing believers and potential believers who God really is, and calling them to bold, enthusiastic, and dynamic ministry in God’s name. As Watchman Nee describes,

The prime work of the Holy Spirit is to transmit the resurrected Lord to us. He does not convey the Christ as recorded in the Gospels; He transmits the resurrected Christ... Resurrection breaks through all barriers. Normally only the everlasting transcends all. But God plans to allow the mortal to transcend also. The work of the Holy Spirit today is to reveal this resurrection power in us.¹¹

Hauerwas and Willimon explain this in relation to the church, writing that “The church, as the body of Christ, implies that by the Holy Spirit’s descent upon the body we are made participants into the life of the Trinity.”¹² Franciscan priest Father Richard Rohr brings it to the personal level explaining that the Trinity intentionally invites individuals

⁹ Koo Dong Yun, *The Holy Spirit and Ch'i (Qi): A Chiological Approach to Pneumatology* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2010), 111.

¹⁰ Hauerwas and Willimon, *The Holy Spirit*, 13.

¹¹ Nee, *The Communion of the Holy Spirit*, 17-18.

¹² Hauerwas and Willimon, *The Holy Spirit*, 17-18.

and all of creation into the circle of love by describing it as the divine dance.¹³ He quotes Carl McColman as saying,

God is in us, because we are in Christ. As members of the mystical body, Christians actually partake in the divine nature of the Trinity. We do not merely watch the dance, we dance the dance. We join hands with Christ and the Spirit flows through us and between us and our feet move always in the loving embrace of the Father. In that we are members of the mystical body of Christ, we see the joyful love of the Father through the eyes of the Son. And with every breath, we breathe the Holy Spirit.¹⁴

This relationship—this love calling and inviting—makes the call to the church to share this love even more urgent and imperative. The Holy Spirit’s work and activity inspires and encourages individuals in the fellowship of believers to move forward.

The Person of the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity actively at work in the world today, and especially present in God’s church. Although the Spirit is present in both the Old and New Testament scriptures, most Christian churches focus on the coming of the Holy Spirit during Pentecost “like a rush of violent wind” and consider this event the birth of the Christian church (Acts 2:2). Throughout, the scriptures of the Christian Bible mention the Holy Spirit. Joel 2:28 says, “Then afterward I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions” (Jl. 2:28). In Psalm chapter fifty-one, the Psalmist declares, “Do not cast me away from your presence and do not take your holy spirit from

¹³ Richard Rohr, *The Divine Dance: The Trinity and Your Transformation* (New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 2016), 9.

¹⁴ Rohr, *The Divine Dance*, 64-65.

me” (Ps. 51:11). The people in the Old Testament understood the concept of the Spirit of God, and at least some experienced the reality of the Spirit’s presence with them.

In the New Testament, however, the Spirit takes on a more noticeable role, and the New Testament mentions the Spirit with much more frequency and illumination. All four Gospels mention the Holy Spirit. Matthew points out the role of the Holy Spirit in the pregnancy of Mary as well as the testimony of John the Baptist that one is coming who will baptize with the Holy Spirit. (Mt. 3:11). Matthew 12:32 is a warning to anyone who would dare speak against the Holy Spirit, and in Matthew 28:19 Jesus includes the Holy Spirit in the instructions of the Great Commission. The Gospel of Mark includes the Holy Spirit in similar passages, but Mark also includes a teaching in Mark 13:11: “When they bring you to trial and hand you over, do not worry beforehand about what you are to say; but say whatever is given you at that time, for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit” (Mk. 13:11). Luke speaks of the activity of the Holy Spirit not only in relation to the birth of Jesus, but also in the coming of John the Baptist. The Spirit also leads Jesus into the desert after baptism to experience the time of temptation (Lk. 4:1). The Gospel of John adds more promises about the coming of the Holy Spirit who Jesus will send to be with the disciples after he is gone. The promises were made through Jesus, and they came to fruition as shared in the Book of the Acts of the Apostles when the Holy Spirit arrived at Pentecost. From that point on, the Bible often mentions the Holy Spirit as the Christian church begins to form and develop.

Jesus gives one of the key descriptions of the Holy Spirit in the Gospel of John where Jesus tells his followers he will send the Advocate, stating “And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit

of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you” (Jn. 14:15-16). Jesus also says “I have said these things to you while I am still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you” (Jn. 14:25-26).

In this case, the aspect of the person of the Holy Spirit to which Jesus refers is that which permeates the lives and spirits of believers leading and guiding them in the ways of Christ. After spending his ministry years teaching, training, and preparing his disciples and followers for a dynamic faith that would bring them closer to God, Jesus reassures them he will not leave them alone, but that the Holy Spirit will be with them moving them forward and expanding the ministry that he began.

The Holy Spirit will become a part of them, living in them, and guiding them in truth. The understanding, guidance, and wisdom the Holy Spirit brings to them will set them apart from the world, and this same Holy Spirit will lead them in the ways of God to transform the world. As stated in *The Holy Spirit*, “We spend most of our lives outside of the precincts of the church. Thankfully, the advocate is with us forever, at all times and places, helping us to be the disciples Jesus calls us to be.”¹⁵

Building on the reality that the Holy Spirit as advocate is always present, theologian Shelly Rambo, in her book, *Spirit and Trauma: A Theology of Remaining*, points out that the Holy Spirit does not only walk with believers when life is going well, and everything is beautiful, but is also dynamically present in times of crisis and trauma, especially ongoing and enduring trauma. She shares the story of Paul, a military veteran,

¹⁵ Hauerwas and Willimon, *The Holy Spirit*, 20.

and her conversation with him regarding what the church needs to know about trauma.

His response was very telling:

‘I know I probably have all the symptoms of everything you are talking about, PTSD and all that, but mostly it just feels sad. I feel sad all the time.’ It is a sadness that does not go away. Paul says, ‘The church didn’t provide me a place to bring my experience.’ . . . He claims that his deepest experiences remain untouched by the practices and teachings of the Christian faith; instead, they are met with theological silence. In the few moments that I spoke with Paul, I realized that he had a longing to have the sacred story meet his story. He wants the gospel—the good news—that he preaches and teaches to speak to his story and not erase it. He wants it to be heard for the truth that it speaks, a truth that he cannot fully bring into words.¹⁶

The aspects of trauma which remain with a person, group of people, society, or culture are valid realities which live on in the lives of those affected. The Holy Spirit provides a balm and comfort but does not gloss over or erase the trauma that continues in day-to-day life.

Rambo goes on to explore the work of the Holy Spirit on Holy Saturday and urges the church to take time to recognize and sit with the reality of death in the story of the crucifixion before jumping to the glory of the resurrection. It is this recognition of what she calls “the middle space”¹⁷ that addresses the often overlooked needs, life realities, and responses of experienced trauma. She notes, “I show that there is not finality to the event of the cross but rather a confrontation with something of death remaining and extending into the territory of life.”¹⁸ Going further, she explains:

Divine love is revealed at the point at which it is most threatened. God experiences, within God’s inner life, the forsakenness of those in hell. Instead of

¹⁶ Shelly Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma: A Theology of Remaining* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 2-3.

¹⁷ Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*, 41.

¹⁸ Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*, 46.

heroically rescuing the forsaken in hell, the Son identifies with them. Becoming one of the forsaken, he is without the Father. This translates into a picture of love traveling to the place where there is no love, and this is the central force of Holy Saturday . . . We receive, in the drama of hell, assurance that there is no place that God has not been. God has traveled even to the regions of god forsakenness.¹⁹

Rambo notes, “If the middle describes the space in which persons find themselves in the aftermath of trauma, the middle Spirit provides a vision of God’s presence in the abyss.”²⁰ With the rise of social media and constantly available news reporting, society is more connected to incidents of trauma than ever in history. Terrorist attacks, mass murders, racist attacks, and the news media coverage in the aftermath of each event brings trauma into the home whether those watching were anywhere near where it happened. Empathy, love, and caring are sparked as are prayers and concerns. For many, action needs to be taken, but in what form, and how will it make a difference? As societal trauma builds on societal trauma, there are fewer and fewer spaces which feel safe and secure, leaving many believers wondering where God is in all of this. The church can provide a reminder and assurance that God walks with God’s people through all of this and can bring new life out of even the worst trauma. The trauma does not disappear, but a spark or ember may be found which provides the beginning of life moving forward. This is the work of the advocate promised by Jesus in the Gospel of John.

References to the Holy Spirit continue in many of the New Testament Epistles. Some tell of the work of the Spirit, but Galatians 5:22-23 tells of the fruit of the Spirit (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control) that comes into the life of the church and into the followers of Jesus. The letter of

¹⁹ Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*, 68-69.

²⁰ Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*, 113-114.

Galatians points out the behaviors that are evident in godly people being guided by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is present and at work in the lives of believers as they strive to follow in the way of Christ and help to nurture each other in the faith. In addition to these characteristics, the Spirit brings an unbridled energy and inspiration uplifting and propelling believers forward. J. Rodman Williams highlights this in speaking about the Holy Spirit when he says, “God as spirit is free. Spirit is unbound, untrammelled, uncoerced, God knows no limits of any kind.”²¹ He goes on to say, “The important thing to recognize is not that the Spirit equals power, but that where the Spirit of God is there is power. Moreover, we are to understand that to be ‘filled with the Holy Spirit’ is not simply to be filled with a substance or force but to be fully possessed by the Holy Spirit, the personal Spirit of God.”²²

The Holy Spirit is not complacent; it is energy actively awakening action in those who believe and actively calling those whose hearts yearn for God but fail to understand or define what they seek. Sarah Coakley addresses the power of the Holy Spirit to break through into a person’s lived narrative and introduce a new reality with which the individual can then interact saying,

There is, then, an inherent reflexivity in the divine, a ceaseless outgoing and return of the desiring God; and insofar as I welcome and receive this reflexivity, I find that it is the Holy Spirit who ‘interrupts’ my human monologue to a (supposedly) monadic God; it is the Holy Spirit who finally thereby causes me to see God no longer as patriarchal threat but as infinite tenderness; but it is also the Holy Spirit who first painfully darkens my prior certainties, enflames and checks my own desires, and so invites me ever more deeply into the life of redemption in

²¹ J. Rodman Williams, *Renewal Theology: Systematic Theology from a Charismatic Perspective* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), location 1132, Kindle.

²² Williams, *Renewal Theology*, location 2101, Kindle.

Christ. In short, it is this ‘reflexivity in God’, this Holy Spirit, that makes incarnate life possible.²³

This reflexivity, to use Coakley’s term, brings the relationship to fruition and brings believers into the divine dance as mentioned earlier. The Holy Spirit is key to this communion of the Godhead and its creation. The Holy Spirit is a real, felt presence in the lives of people. Kenneth Collins notes, “Believers...in contemplating the crucifixion and other spiritual truths...often encounter a subtle, mysterious other: a Spirit, a Real Presence, who glorifies Christ and who makes these and other truths known in a way that goes beyond human expression.”²⁴

How the Holy Spirit Is Known in the Church

Currently in mainstream traditional churches in the United States, in addition to scripture, the Holy Spirit is most often known through mentions in creeds and soteriology. The Apostles’ Creed and Nicene Creed that persons often recite in creedal churches, especially in Eucharistic liturgies, articulate the importance of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Godhead and the church’s beliefs surrounding the reality and purpose of the Holy Spirit. The Apostles’ Creed, after acknowledging belief in God, the Father as creator, and giving a summary of the life, death, resurrection, and purpose of Jesus, the Son, states, “I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.

²³ Coakley, *God, Sexuality, and the Self*, 56.

²⁴ Kenneth J. Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley: Holy Love and the Shape of Grace* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2007), 121.

Amen.”²⁵ The Nicene Creed acknowledges one God, the Father who created everything, “one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God,” and again goes into great detail about the life, death, resurrection, and purpose of Jesus.²⁶ The creed concludes with,

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets. We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic church. We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.²⁷

Both creeds, which are central to stating the beliefs of the faith, include limited information about the Holy Spirit beyond acknowledging its existence. The Nicene Creed gives a bit more information but fails to flesh out the activity and role of the Holy Spirit in the day-to-day existence of the church. After stating the reality of the existence of the Holy Spirit, the creeds move on to a list of other aspects of beliefs. God as Father and Creator is relatable and understandable to human beings. Persons comprehend and believe in Jesus as the Son of God, who lived, died, and rose again, as the miraculous presence of God coming to be present in creation. The Holy Spirit, however, is more ethereal and difficult for human brains to comprehend. The Holy Spirit moves and acts at will, appearing without warning, calling people to action, leading Christ’s holy church, and moving throughout the world and universe as it chooses. The creeds give little help to new believers seeking to understand the movement and reality of the Holy Spirit.

In soteriology, the doctrine of salvation, the Holy Spirit is at work in preparing people for belief. Charles Yrigoyen states, “Prevenient grace is the divine love that

²⁵ The United Methodist Church, *The United Methodist Hymnal: Book of United Methodist Worship* (Nashville, TN: The United Methodist Publishing House, 2014), 881.

²⁶ The United Methodist Church, *The United Methodist Hymnal*, 880.

²⁷ The United Methodist Church, *The United Methodist Hymnal*, 880.

surrounds all of us. It is grace that goes before and prepares us for further expressions of God's love and purpose in our lives. Prevenient, or preparing, grace is at work in all people through the presence of the Holy Spirit."²⁸ In addition to revealing and illuminating God, the Holy Spirit also brings about a transformation of hearts. John Wesley described this stating that "the Holy Spirit...prepares us for his inward kingdom, whereby the heart and its various tempers and afflictions are transformed by love...the Holy Spirit is now resident in the heart in a new way."²⁹ This working of the Holy Spirit in believers' lives opens the way for truly experiencing God's justifying and sanctifying grace thereby preparing the hearts of believers to feel and know the assurance of God's pardon while also exhibiting the fruits of the Holy Spirit in their lives. Yet, as important as the work of the Holy Spirit is to a life of deeply embedded faith and discipleship, the traditional mainline church rarely spends much time focusing on the Holy Spirit outside of confirmation and membership classes, and a cursory mention on Pentecost and Trinity Sunday.

The work of the Holy Spirit created the church and brings believers into the community of God in a loving, grace-filled, and empowered relationship with the Creator, Redeemer, and Advocate. Ideally, it is through this community that the work of individual believers is multiplied and enhanced kindling a renewed fire of faith and a fresh breath of testimony. As Watchman Nee notes,

The exceeding greatness of God's power which works in Christ works also in us the Church...The way by which God broke through all limitations in the Lord is

²⁸ Charles Yrigoyen Jr., *Belief Matters: United Methodism's Doctrinal Standards* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2001), 48.

²⁹ Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley*, 124.

the same way God will enable the Church to break through all barriers...The Church is the reservoir of the power of resurrection today.³⁰

Nee goes on to note that the church fails to appear until after the Gospel stories are complete attributing this to the restrictions on Jesus' life on earth. He writes, "We think it is enough to possess the Lord's earthly power and authority, but God pronounces this to be insufficient. God led Christ through death and resurrection, and then through the coming of the Holy Spirit deposited that resurrection power in the Church."³¹ The church through the presence of the Holy Spirit is to be a place of life and rejuvenation. While some churches do this, others dismiss the Holy Spirit thereby ignoring its call to dynamic ministry so believers can remain in their places of comfort and not feel the need to make any changes.

How the Holy Spirit Is Sidelined in the Church

Since the coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost brought about the establishment of the church, it would make sense that the church would spend a good deal of time and effort focused on the activity and call of the Holy Spirit. This was true in the earliest days of the church but waned over time and is now, in many churches, a very rare occurrence. Many scholars and authors noticed this change and the change it brought to the church as well.

Gary Tyra, in his book *The Holy Spirit in Mission: Prophetic Speech and Action in Christian Witness*, focuses on the Great Commission and Great Commandments, but notes that the working of the Holy Spirit always informs and empowers the work in

³⁰ Nee, *The Communion of the Holy Spirit*, 19-20.

³¹ Nee, *The Communion of the Holy Spirit*, 20.

fulfilling these instructions that Jesus gave and magnified. This is in spite of the fact that, as he points out, the church in Western Europe and America lost sight of the idea of the empowering and real presence of the Holy Spirit in ministry. Gordon Fee in *Gospel and Spirit* also notes the lack of attention to the Holy Spirit and contrasts this attitude with that of the early church saying, “I think it is fair to note that if there is one thing that differentiates the early church from its twentieth-century counterpart it is in the level of awareness and experience of the presence and power of the Holy Spirit.”³² He goes on to observe that when Christians today are asked “to define or describe Christian conversion or Christian life...the most noticeable feature of that definition would be its general lack of emphasis on the active, dynamic role of the Spirit.”³³ Fee goes on to call out this attitude saying,

It is precisely the opposite in the New Testament. The Spirit is no mere addendum. Indeed, he is the *sine qua non*, the essential ingredient, of Christian life. Nor is he a mere datum of theology; rather, he is experienced as a powerful presence in their lives. Whatever else may be said of the early church, it was first and foremost comprised of people of the Spirit.³⁴

This ‘disappearance’ of the Spirit from the church profoundly impacted the life and witness of the church. In looking at the earliest Christians, Fee notes that:

The Spirit was always thought of as a powerful presence. Indeed the terms Spirit and power at times are nearly interchangeable. For the earliest believers life in Christ meant life in the Spirit, and that meant life characterized by power, not simply some quiet, pervasive force. . . The Spirit was not someone believed in or about; he was experienced, powerfully experienced in the life of the church.³⁵

³² Gordon D. Fee, *Gospel and Spirit: Issues in New Testament Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1991), 111.

³³ Fee, *Gospel and Spirit*, 111.

³⁴ Fee, *Gospel and Spirit*, 111.

³⁵ Fee, *Gospel and Spirit*, 115.

In other writings, Fee expands on this saying,

Christian life came to consist of conversion without empowering, baptism without obedience, grace without love. Indeed the whole Calvinist-Arminian debate is predicated on this reality, that people can be in the church, but evidence little or nothing of the work of the Spirit in their lives. Cheap grace, Bonhoeffer called it. That such so-called Christian life exists can not only not be denied, but one may have ruefully to admit that it represents the vast majority of believers in the history of the church. However, surely no one will argue that such should be the norm — even if it is now quite normal.³⁶

The Holy Spirit was at work calling out followers of Jesus to live as true disciples and to share the Good News with the world as Jesus commanded the disciples in the Great Commission. Many in the church today could use a wake-up call and a renewal of their spiritual lives. In the book *Church Worth Getting Up For*, Charles Gutenson points out the necessity of rejuvenating the church through hearing and following the urgings and call of the Holy Spirit. He writes that “God really isn’t tame. Yet, on your average Sunday, at your average church, we not only speak of God as if God were tame, we even go so far as to make God seem downright boring.”³⁷ The God of the scriptures is anything but boring!

Yet, Gutenson points out that hope is not lost. The Holy Spirit is still at work. He adds that “The Lord we serve, the Holy Spirit that empowers us, the God and Father of us all who sends them and us into the world, this triune God simply does not know how to fail. The first reason we Christians have to be hopeful is that God is still in the business of turning the world upside down.”³⁸

³⁶ Gordon D. Fee, “Baptism in the Holy Spirit: The Issue of Separability and Subsequence,” *Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* 7, no. 2 (Fall 1985): 97.

³⁷ Charles Gutenson, *Church Worth Getting Up For* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2013), 19.

³⁸ Gutenson, *Church Worth Getting Up For*, 116-117.

Embracing the Holy Spirit

The church would be well-served to rediscover and lean into the leading of the Holy Spirit as it plans, develops, carries out, and evaluates its ministries. Long-established churches can easily fall into a pattern that works for them and over time close themselves off to new ideas, ministries, and inspiration from the Holy Spirit, but this is precisely where the church needs to have its focus and energy. The Holy Spirit is a catalyst for new things by guiding, inspiring, and leading churches to new people, places, and ministries. However, the leading only works when believers and congregations are willing to pursue the direction and possibilities given.

In John 14:16-17, Jesus tells the disciples that he will ask the Father to send an “advocate to help you and be with you forever – the Spirit of truth” (Jn. 14:16-17). He goes on to say, “The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you” (Jn. 14:17). The Holy Spirit is being sent to Jesus’ followers to help them and will do that through living in them and being in them. The Holy Spirit’s presence will infuse everything they do if they will allow it. The same promise came down to each generation of believers throughout the ages. The church is given a knowledge the world does not have and has a call and expectation to witness to the world about the overwhelming and unending love of God.

Watchman Nee addresses this idea of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in messages compiled in *The Communion of the Holy Spirit* as he analyzes what it means and what it looks like to experience an outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Nee explains,

People who receive the outpouring of the Holy Spirit have these two characteristics: first, their minds are clear; second, their wills are not passive.

They themselves are active, not allowing outside forces to work upon them. The Holy Spirit always requests a believer to actively exercise his will to cooperate with Him.³⁹

He goes on to explain that by the first comment regarding clear minds, he means sins must be dealt with, not hidden away. Hiding or holding on to sin and not presenting it before God gives an opening for the person to be led astray, and “he is opened to be led astray by evil spirits.”⁴⁰ By the second comment, Nee explains that the Holy Spirit desires and even demands active participation from the believer stating, “He requires the active desire of our will. Only then will He come.”⁴¹ He goes on to explain,

For the Holy Spirit to come upon you, you yourself must express your desire, and so He comes. It is not the Holy Spirit working independently. It is you who works actively and the Spirit comes to help. The Holy Spirit makes me laugh because I have begun to laugh. He then gives me power to laugh. This is what I mean by cooperation. As you seek the outpouring of the Spirit, you need to ask the Lord to cover you with His precious blood. You do your part, and the Spirit will most definitely do His part.⁴²

The church was blessed with the power and presence of the Holy Spirit so that it can be a dynamic force for transformation in the world. Nee compares this to God breathing life into Adam. God did that so Adam could live, and, in the same manner, the breath of the Holy Spirit brings life to the church. Without that breath, Nee points out, “the [church] is likewise dead.”⁴³ The breath of the Holy Spirit brings a freedom and boldness for God that believers fail to exhibit prior to that experience. Peter exhibits this in the Gospels where he is bold and often rash, but after the coming of the Holy Spirit finds a voice that

³⁹ Nee, *The Communion of the Holy Spirit*, 38.

⁴⁰ Nee, *The Communion of the Holy Spirit*, 39.

⁴¹ Nee, *The Communion of the Holy Spirit*, 39.

⁴² Nee, *The Communion of the Holy Spirit*, 39-40.

⁴³ Nee, *The Communion of the Holy Spirit*, 57-58.

could convert thousands to a changed life and baptism. Nee goes further to say that “a person who has the outpouring of the Holy Spirit can turn the atmosphere in accordance with his atmosphere. May we all receive the outpouring of the Holy Spirit so that we may be atmosphere-changers!”⁴⁴ When people embrace the presence of the Holy Spirit, a glorious adventure awaits. As Hauerwas and Willimon note, “Christians are people who dare to live in the power of the Holy Spirit, that is, live lives out of control, coming to God dependent, empty-handed, lives driven by and accountable to someone more interesting than ourselves.”⁴⁵ Oh that the traditional church would rediscover and embrace this daring spirit and be a part of the awakening and adventure!

How the Holy Spirit Works to Bring Rejuvenation and New Life

Hauerwas and Willimon write that:

Just as the Spirit brooded over the waters at creation, the church is birthed by the Holy Spirit. The church lives not by savvy, worldly wisdom, and techniques for church growth but rather lives moment by moment, in every time and place, utterly dependent upon the gifts of the Spirit.⁴⁶

The Holy Spirit empowers those who believe to follow the call and urgings of the Spirit for the purposes of God. To deepen the believer’s relationship with God, believers are encouraged to study the scriptures, attend worship, and practice various Means of Grace.

Augustine writes about the Holy Spirit and scripture stating,

Accordingly the Holy Spirit has, with admirable wisdom and care for our welfare, so arranged the Holy Scriptures as by the plainer passages to satisfy our hunger, and by the more obscure to stimulate our appetite. For almost nothing is dug out

⁴⁴ Nee, *The Communion of the Holy Spirit*, 72.

⁴⁵ Hauerwas and Willimon, *The Holy Spirit*, i.

⁴⁶ Hauerwas and Willimon, *The Holy Spirit*, i.

of those obscure passages which may not be found set forth in the plainest language elsewhere.⁴⁷

Attending and actively participating in worship places the believer in community in the presence of the Holy Spirit. As C. Nelson Ellis writes in *Where Faith Begins*,

What is unique in Christian worship is an experience with the God of the Bible. It is experience of the most intense kind and is personal to the extent that one feels the whole world is less real than the presence of God; but the difference is that one experiences the God who is described in the Bible...Likewise, we read and expound the Scriptures because we have in the past revelation of God an image of God that can be activated in our mind by the Holy Spirit.⁴⁸

The Holy Spirit is actively at work in the church of Jesus Christ. As Stanley Grenz states,

Since Pentecost, therefore, the Spirit enjoys a new identity. He is the 'vicar of Christ,' the mediator of the presence of the risen and exalted Jesus within his community. The Spirit teaches, leads, and empowers the church on the Lord's behalf. In doing so, he is the Lord at work in the believing community.⁴⁹

Through this activity the Holy Spirit works to bring about change, yet if the church that should be home to the Holy Spirit rejects or ignores the Holy Spirit, the Spirit will find new ways to accomplish the goals of God on earth. Scriptures are full of God doing a new and different thing to move the world forward. Miracles happened, dietary laws changed as Gentiles were added to God's people, and an evangelist ended up on a desert road with an Ethiopian all because God had purposes that God was determined would be met.

⁴⁷ Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, location 988, Kindle.

⁴⁸ C. Ellis Nelson, *Where Faith Begins* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1976), 103.

⁴⁹ Stanley J. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000), 372.

Ways the Holy Spirit Works in the World Today

The Holy Spirit continues to be always present surrounding everyone with God's love and care even before a person can know or comprehend that presence. Once persons believe in Christ, the Holy Spirit becomes a part of those persons and leads them into the life and ministries God wants for them. Each person must decide whether to answer that leading. The Holy Spirit is active in the world and people need to know the Holy Spirit always surrounds them and can bring healing and peace to their lives and to the lives of others. To this point, Bill Hull writes that "The disciples could make such drastic changes because the Holy Spirit would do [Christ's] work. He would serve as counselor, friend, teacher, guide, parent, and a reminder of all that Jesus had taught them."⁵⁰ The church today has the same potential. The world is a mess, but God is still very present and active. The church needs to intentionally teach members about the Holy Spirit and invite the Holy Spirit to be present in its worship and ministry. It needs to welcome and embrace the presence of the Holy Spirit in its midst. J. Rodman Williams, in talking about baptism in the Holy Spirit notes,

It depicts vividly the idea of being enveloped in the reality of the Holy Spirit. Since to be baptized in water means literally to be immersed in, plunged under, and even drenched or soaked with, then to be baptized in the Holy Spirit can mean no less than that. In immersion no part of the body is left untouched; everything goes under. So with Spirit baptism the whole being of a person—body, soul, and spirit—is imbued with the Spirit of God. Likewise, the community of those who are so baptized is profoundly affected in its total life. Both individual and community are touched in every area by the presence and power of the living God.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Bill Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship: On Being and Making Followers of Christ* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2006), 184.

⁵¹ Williams, *Renewal Theology*, location 17868, Kindle.

The Holy Spirit will not be satisfied being stored away in the dusty archives of a church closet, nor will believers' hunger for the Lord be satisfied when that is the case. Believers still need a comforter, teacher, guide, and advocate. The world desperately needs people filled with the Spirit. Therefore, it is time to teach, it is time to learn, and it is time for the church to open hearts to God and see what the power of the Holy Spirit will do next.

Conclusion

The Holy Spirit continues to actively work in the world today. The church and believers remain key parts of carrying out the Holy Spirit's plans as the Spirit speaks into their lives inspiring and moving them to new and impassioned witness. As Hauerwas and Willimon state, "It is the nature of the Holy Spirit to shake up the church, particularly when the church becomes self-satisfied and content with the status quo."⁵² J. Rodman Williams notes that the Holy Spirit brings an "enabling power by which the witness to Jesus can be carried forward in both word and deed. The gift of this power brings about extraordinary boldness and courage."⁵³

The Holy Spirit actively moves enticing people to a deeper understanding and involvement with God. Baptism in the Spirit allows believers to find their center and connect with their Creator; to find the unknowns for which they search; to know the true meaning of life and God's purpose for their individual lives; and to actively become a valued part of the life-giving, world-changing ministry of God. There are generations of people who have not been introduced to the God of the Bible. They may have a cursory

⁵² Hauerwas and Willimon, *The Holy Spirit*, 55.

⁵³ Williams, *Renewal Theology*, location 21526, Kindle.

knowledge of Christianity or have a sense of what it is through media or news stories, but for many, a personal experience with the fullness of the Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—is missing. Assumptions and negative experiences in churches affected those whom God is calling, and it is up to the church through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit to provide safe spaces for the true love and transformative movement of God to reach in, breathe, and give them life.

Is it any wonder that a church that shelves the Holy Spirit finds itself in a place of declining membership and attendance? Is it any wonder that a church that locks away the Holy Spirit finds itself questioning its purpose and ministries? Is it any wonder that a church that keeps the Holy Spirit safely in a box finds itself complaining about colors of pew cushions or whether praise music is appropriate for worship? Disenchantment abounds even for those still active in the church as petty disputes take precedence over the transforming, active movement of God. The church needs fresh air. The Holy Spirit needs to be dusted off and embraced. The church needs to find new ways of reaching people where they are and helping them move forward. God does it with Abram, Moses, and others in the Old Testament, Jesus does it constantly in the Gospels, and the Holy Spirit shows how it could be done in the church throughout the Acts of the Apostles.

Hauerwas and Willimon note,

The Holy Spirit is the breath of God; that breath and wind are central images the Bible uses to describe the Holy Spirit suggest that the Holy Spirit is a wild, unpredictable character...Because the Holy Spirit not only enters our time but also commandeers our lives, we can hope for lives that are adventuresome—even wild and unpredictable.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ Hauerwas and Willimon, *The Holy Spirit*, 46-47.

People yearning for control do not want things to be unpredictable and tend to avoid the Holy Spirit, yet it is only through giving up control and opening oneself to the adventure that one becomes truly free. The Holy Spirit brings life, awakening, and energy as faith is deepened and lived. For the church to reach new generations, it must resuscitate its relationship with the Holy Spirit and recommit itself to living fully into the Holy Spirit's presence and call. Doing so will rekindle the flames of the first Pentecost thereby awakening new faith and commitments and transforming lives for the Kingdom of God.

CHAPTER FIVE

INTERDISCIPLINARY FOUNDATIONS

Introduction

For the church to reach out and train disciples for the ministry of Jesus Christ in the world, it is essential to understand how people learn and grow at various times in their lives, and the best ways to share information so that they will understand and have it resonate with them. The field of Human Growth and Development focuses on the needs of people from birth to death covering physical, intellectual, mental, emotional, and social needs as well as readiness for specific types of information at various stages of life. For the church to rise to the challenge of making disciples with a new generation, a foundational understanding of this field will be key.

The church is called to create disciples who know and live into the teachings of Jesus. Throughout history the challenge for the Christian church regarding this call has been how best to reach out, convert, and then form new believers as they become new creations in Christ. The first disciples focused on Jewish persons informing them that the Messiah had come and fulfilled the prophecies. Their ministry was expanded by the working of the Holy Spirit who sent them to the Gentiles, especially after God called Paul who became a believer in Jesus. They brought something new that often caused confusion and anger, but also brought joy, renewal, and a shift in the status quo. Philip showed this in the story in Acts as he interacted with the Ethiopian explaining the

scriptures in ways the Ethiopian could understand thereby helping to bring him to a place of belief and commitment.

In the United States, as new territories opened and settlers began making their homes in what was considered wilderness, the church adapted its practices so settlers would have the opportunity to know and follow God. Camp meetings in these areas became places of testimony, conversion, worship, and renewal as devoted believers shared the gospel truths with other settlers. The commitment of believers, a movement of the Holy Spirit, and a willingness to go to the people combined to bring a new energy and life to the frontier. In the same vein, established congregations began to take seriously their call to justice ministries and activism thereby embarking on social justice movements such as the abolition of slavery and temperance. They also joined the Sunday School Movement and started Tract Societies and publishing houses to be more effective in evangelism and training disciples. The creative and powerful work of the Holy Spirit led to the creation and growth in faith of disciples who went out to share the good news in new ways and reach out to others wherever they were found.

The church today is poised for a resurgence and renewal, but it will not come in the same way it came for earlier generations. Young adults today live in a much different culture than those of the previous generation and have many options vying for their time on Sunday mornings when the traditional church usually meets. In today's culture, finding time for a personal life amid the demands of changing work schedules, family needs, schooling, and household chores is a challenge. Adding the expectations of an established church that has an inflexible schedule fails to represent a loving community that cares for those it is trying to reach. For the church today to reach new generations, it

must come alongside people as they go through life's trials and decisions while providing ways to come closer to Christ when and where the person is ready. The creative use of various technologies will be key to this effort. Through platforms and applications that young adults currently use, software can be developed or shared that can bring knowledge, faith training, community, and mission opportunities that will then help them grow in discipleship.

This chapter focuses on how the field of Human Growth and Development informs the task of making disciples. It will explore the theories developed by leaders in the field such as Abraham H. Maslow, Erik Erikson, Jean Piaget, and Lawrence Kohlberg, and then move forward into more current evolutions of thought built on those foundations. The chapter then moves into theories of religious and faith development that the earlier works informed. This information, and how it was used and critiqued through the years, will be key in creating appropriate apps, games, media sites, etc. to deepen faith and build discipleship.

Human Growth and Development

Abraham H. Maslow

Abraham H. Maslow (1908-1970) approached human growth and development from a scientific psychology background and is best known for creating the Hierarchy of Needs, which postulates that meeting certain needs is a prerequisite for motivating a person to grow. The hierarchy of needs is most often displayed as a pyramid with the most basic needs at the bottom as a foundation for life with seeking self through

creativity and developing personal interests as the peak. Saul A. McLeod writes that “A musician must make music, an artist must paint, a poet must write, if he is to be ultimately happy. What a man can be, he must be. This need we may call self-actualization.”¹ Maslow says, “[Self-actualization] refers to the desire for self-fulfillment, namely, to the tendency for [a person] to become actualized in what he is potentially. This tendency might be phrased as the desire to become more and more what one is, to become everything that one is capable of becoming.”²

The Hierarchy of Needs builds from Maslow’s theory that,

There are at least five sets of goals, which we may call basic needs. These are briefly - physiological, safety, love, esteem, and self-actualization. In addition, we are motivated by the desire to achieve or maintain the various conditions upon which these basic satisfactions rest and by certain more intellectual desires.³

These goals are such that basic needs take precedence over higher needs. Addressing basic needs and achieving comfort frees the person to pursue new needs and interests as they arise. Once basic needs such as food, clothing, and shelter are met, the person can put the person’s efforts into safety and security. Once persons feel safe, they are free to pursue love. They build on the prior to open space for the next level with self-actualization being the peak when the person discovers who the person is meant to be or what is fulfilling and brings satisfaction to that person’s life.

Maslow acknowledges that the chart is somewhat fluid although it looks rigidly defined. There were times in his research when he discovered people for whom the needs,

¹ Saul A. McLeod, “Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs,” SimplyPsychology, March 20, 2020, last modified December 29, 2020, <https://www.simplypsychology.org/maslow.html>.

² Abraham H. Maslow, “Hierarchy of Needs: A Theory of Human Motivation,” *All About Psychology*, 2011, www.all-about-psychology.com, 71.

³ Maslow, “Hierarchy of Needs,” www.all-about-psychology.com, 84.

desires, and abilities presented in a different order. He mentions examples of people who were driven to creativity even without having their basic needs met, or, possibly, because of not having their basic needs met.⁴ In moving forward with discipleship-building research, it will be key to remember that basic needs and growth toward self-actualization will play a role in how technologies will need to be created and adapted for use.

Erik H. Erikson

Erik Erikson (1902-1994) focused his work on identity and how persons come to have their own unique personal identities. Through his research, Erikson lifted eight life crises that tend to be key turning points or identity-making situations in life. He defines what became known as an ‘identity crisis’ by saying, “It is now being accepted as designating a necessary turning point, a crucial moment, when development must move one way or another, marshaling resources of growth, recovery, and further differentiation.”⁵ The eight stages of development and the ages when they most commonly occur, according to Erikson, are:

Basic Trust vs. Basic Mistrust (Birth to Eighteen Months), Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt (Eighteen Months to Three Years), Initiative vs. Guilt (Three to Six Years), Industry vs. Inferiority (Six Years Through Puberty), Identity vs. Role Confusion (Adolescence), Intimacy vs. Isolation (Young Adulthood), Generativity vs. Stagnation (Middle Age), and Ego Integrity vs. Despair (Old Age).⁶

⁴ Maslow, “Hierarchy of Needs,” www.all-about-psychology.com, 75.

⁵ Erik H. Erikson, *Identity: Youth and Crisis* (New York, NY: W. W. Norton and Company, 1994), 16.

⁶ L. Joseph Stone and Joseph Church, *Childhood and Adolescence: A Psychology of the Growing Person*, 4th ed. (New York, NY: Random House, 1979), 39.

Erikson goes on to define the positive and negative outcomes of each stage of development. The outcomes of each stage affect how the next stage is approached and informed. If children in the first stage come out with a basic mistrust of their settings, this will inform how they approach autonomy. This could occur, for example, in cases where basic needs are not met, and parents or other caregivers are not attentive or are abusive. Has enough changed in their lives; will they find inner resources to allow them to build their own self-worth; or will they find it difficult if not impossible to see themselves as being worthy of love? By the time the person reaches young adulthood, the outcomes of all the previous stages have informed who the person is, and the challenge for the age is to build meaningful intimate relationships. This is the stage of development for those involved in the research for this project.

Going further to middle age and older adults, the tendency of the traditional church to try to hold on to what worked in the past becomes more understandable. Adults in middle age are discerning a call to care for following generations as opposed to becoming self-focused and expecting their own wants and needs to take precedence over all else. The adults accepting a call to care want to share what worked for them and pass it on to the next generation. Adults concerned for their own comfort just want things to stay the same and expect others to be satisfied with the way things always were done. The oldest adults are assessing their lives and are comfortable with what they did and decisions they made. These adults may also be dissatisfied with where they are and what their lives were and seek assurance and answers before their lives end. These are the adults who are pillars of the church and beloved as elders who are full of wisdom and light or those who, due to their own needs, refuse to see the needs of others or be open to

any changes.⁷ While Erikson's stages focus on positive and negative outcomes, reality includes many variations on a continuum as people grow and change throughout their lives. For the purposes of building up the church and reaching new generations, Erikson's work is key in helping to understand personalities in the church and their needs as new ministries are created and tried.

Jean Piaget

Jean Piaget (1896-1980) was trained in psychology and was a cognitive theorist. Stone and Church write that "Cognitive theory explains behavior in terms of internal processes, particularly those involved in knowledge and thinking (that is, cognition) whereas behaviorism tries to avoid intermediating mechanisms and talks only about what can be observed externally."⁸ Piaget focused on the child and how children develop. An understanding of his work will be helpful to the church as it designs family ministry as well as curricula for ministries with children. Understanding his work will also be helpful as background information in circumstances where an adult failed to move out of a childhood stage of cognitive development. Jesus met people where they were. An understanding of how people understand and learn new things will help the church as it endeavors to do the same in fresh and different ways.

In Piaget's work, ages are approximate and Piaget's Stages of Cognitive Development are Sensorimotor Stage (first two years of life), Preoperational (ages two through six or seven), Concrete Operations (ages six to eleven), and Formal Operations

⁷ Stone and Church, *Childhood and Adolescence*, 39.

⁸ Stone and Church, *Childhood and Adolescence*, 40.

(age twelve and older).⁹ Each stage of development addresses the acquisition of intelligence in various phases of life. The Sensorimotor Stage, which covers the beginning of a child's life, finds learning occurring through sensory and motor skills because those are the tools by which infants and toddlers must interact with the world around them. Preoperational, which in the United States would be preschool age through kindergarten, is a time of learning through play thereby developing imagination and exploring invented places and scenarios. The period of Concrete Operations correlates to elementary school in the United States. Children in this stage begin to think logically and grasp concepts that they can see and with which they can interact in a concrete fashion. Formal Operations is a time when people begin to grasp deeper concepts. They developed logical thought and can intellectually grasp concepts that are intangible.

Piaget's stages do not stand alone, but each stage builds on the previous one. As described by Jerome Kagan in the "Introduction" to *The Psychology of the Child*,

A central notion in Piaget's ambitious project is that intellectual competence represents an integrated ensemble of operations built from reflections on the child's actions in the world. A second seminal claim is that intellectual development passes through a series of connected stages, in which some knowledge from an earlier stage is incorporated into the next. The third critical assumption, Platonic in flavor, is that a unified cognitive competence that serves adaptation is the telos of development.¹⁰

The idea of Formal Operations in the teenage years was groundbreaking when introduced. Until that time, most psychological studies focused on the hormonal changes of puberty to explain adolescent tendencies to question, dig deeper for information, or be dissatisfied with their lives. Kagan explains that,

⁹ Stone and Church, *Childhood and Adolescence*, 40.

¹⁰ Jean Piaget and Bärbel Inhelder, *The Psychology of the Child*, trans. Helen Weaver (New York, NY: Basic Books, Inc., 2000), location 41, Kindle.

The notion of formal operations implied that the psychological tensions experienced by adolescents were not due primarily to a surge of sex hormones but to the ability to detect logical inconsistencies in personal beliefs and to experience the imperative to resolve them by affirming one belief and rejecting the others.¹¹

John Flavell, in the book *The Developmental Psychology of Jean Piaget*, notes that Piaget emphasizes that,

Not all individuals need achieve the final stages of development...Piaget has also for a long time freely conceded that not all 'normal' adults, even within one culture, end up at a common genetic level; adults will show adult thought only in those content areas in which they have been socialized.¹²

Lawrence Kohlberg

Lawrence Kohlberg (1927-1987) built on the work of Jean Piaget to expand understanding of people's moral development. He determined that there were "three major levels of moral judgment (with two substages in each level) spanning the years from seven to sixteen and linked with the youngsters' cognitive abilities."¹³ The three levels are Preconventional, Conventional, and Postconventional. The Preconventional level,

Emphasizes avoidance of punishment and deference to power...The Conventional level features children "governed by the accepted moral codes of their family and society, regardless of immediate consequences," and...the Postconventional level "is supposed to be based on individually defined principles of right and wrong without regard for conventional morality" "However the Postconventional level appeared in only a small minority of older subjects and was virtually non-existent in certain other cultural settings."¹⁴

¹¹ Piaget and Inhelder, *The Psychology of the Child*, location 66, Kindle.

¹² John H. Flavell, *The Developmental Psychology of Jean Piaget* (NP: Barakaldo Books, 2020), 42.

¹³ Stone and Church, *Childhood and Adolescence*, 448.

¹⁴ Stone and Church, *Childhood and Adolescence*, 448.

John C. Gibbs, professor of developmental psychology at the Ohio State University, states in his book *Moral Development and Reality* that “Lawrence Kohlberg called his theoretical approach to morality and moral motivation ‘cognitive developmental’ to describe his contextualization of moral development within social and non-social (or physical) cognitive development.”¹⁵ He also notes that “Kohlberg’s driving insight was that moral development is not complete by the end of childhood, but instead continues throughout the human life span.”¹⁶ Researchers assessing Kohlberg’s theories and findings questioned his conclusions and whether his testing methods actually indicated the outcomes he named. Part of this is due to the subjective nature of assessing the morality stories presented to study subjects; accurately assessing their responses to the conflicts as well as the reality of contextualization; and the difference between what people may say and what they actually do.¹⁷

As Kohlberg explains in an essay from 1971 titled “Stages of Moral Development as a Basis for Moral Education,”

There are only two disciplines that have any basic scholarly generalizations to make about moral education; these are developmental social psychology and moral philosophy. Many other scholarly fields have an interest in moral education, but insofar as this interest leads to scholarly generalizations discussed on their intellectual merits, they are generalizations about either developmental social psychology or the nature of ideal morality...But not only is it the case that there just two ‘disciplines’ or ways of thinking central to moral education. It seems to me that anything worthwhile any of us can say about moral education requires our being simultaneously a social psychologist and a philosopher.¹⁸

¹⁵ John C. Gibbs, *Moral Development and Reality: Beyond the Theories of Kohlberg, Hoffman, and Haidt*, 4th ed. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2019), 45.

¹⁶ Gibbs, *Moral Development and Reality*, 91.

¹⁷ Stone and Church, *Childhood and Adolescence*, 448.

¹⁸ Brenda Munsey, ed., *Moral Development, Moral Education, and Kohlberg: Basic Issues in Philosophy, Psychology, Religion, and Education* (Birmingham, AL: Religious Education Press, 1980), 16.

While philosophy can use scientific theory, its outcomes are arguable and intelligent minds often disagree as to the best answers and decisions.

Newer Cognitive Theories and Information

The theories of Maslow, Erikson, Piaget, and Kohlberg laid the foundation for a psychological and educational understanding of how people learn and develop as well as factors that contribute to success or stagnation at each developmental stage. In the years since the publishing of their theories, new researchers took on the task of moving their theories forward in the context of a new century. While many basics remained the same, new information and scholarly research opened doors to more detailed understandings.

John C. Gibbs performed research considering and in contrast to Kohlberg's stages and lifts the reality of Existential Development. He notes,

Existential development transcends the standard moral judgment stages. The existential phase involves hypothetical contemplation, meta-ethical reflection, the formulation of moral principles or philosophies, and spiritual awakening or ontological inspiration. The most profound expressions of existential development involve transcendent ethical insights...emergent from meditation, existential crises...or near-death crisis events. Such deep inspiration can diminish cognitive distortions and revitalize dedication to the moral life.¹⁹

He determined that there are two phases in moral development that spans a lifetime stating,

Our two-phase view of life-span moral judgment development, then, involves the following points...life-span moral judgment development consists of two overlapping phases: standard (involving an invariant sequence of stages comprised in a rough age trend) and existential (involving meta-ethical, philosophical moral judgment as well as ontological and spiritual concerns and intuitions).²⁰

¹⁹ Gibbs, *Moral Development and Reality*, 107.

²⁰ Gibbs, *Moral Development and Reality*, 108.

Gibbs goes on to break those phases down into levels with standard development including immature and mature stages. He notes that “the standard stages are at least in part ‘constructed,’ particularly through certain facilitative conditions of peer interaction and, beyond childhood, broader contexts of social perspective-taking and coordination.”²¹ The existential phase, according to Gibbs, presents in adolescence or as an adult with the development of “hypothetical reflection or disembedded contemplation (e.g. upon the meaning of life or the universe).”²² He adds that, “Persons may develop existentially from sustained contemplation but also from sudden insights or inspirations (as may occur during meditation, ‘soul-searching’ crises, life-threatening circumstances, or other existentially profound events).”²³ The idea of an existential component builds upon what Kohlberg presented and brings a richer view of moral development in late teens and adults as well as reinforcing Kohlberg’s observations that not all adults will reach this phase. This will be important to the work of making disciples as it lifts the fact that while some young adults deeply consider their places in the universe as they look to build their faith, others will be more concrete and remain in the standard understandings. For the church to reach people where they are, apps and other technologies must take these realities into consideration and provide for the various needs of the users.

Professor and researcher David Kolb was integral in introducing Learning Styles, which built on the previous works mentioned. He is also a strong proponent of experiential learning as a richer way for children, youth, and adults to embrace new

²¹ Gibbs, *Moral Development and Reality*, 108.

²² Gibbs, *Moral Development and Reality*, 108.

²³ Gibbs, *Moral Development and Reality*, 108.

concepts and understandings. In the book Kolb writes with Kay Peterson entitled *How You Learn Is How You Live*, the authors state,

In over forty-five years of research on the theory...the principles and practices of experiential learning have been used to develop and deliver programs in K–12 education, undergraduate education, and professional education. In the workplace, training and development activities and executive coaching practices are based on experiential learning concepts. Practices that are based on experiential learning include service learning, problem-based learning, action learning, adventure education, and simulation and gaming. These practices make use of community service, adventure, and gaming to help people become aware of how they process information and apply that awareness to their personal and professional development.²⁴

They list nine learning styles that ongoing research identified including Experiencing, Imagining, Reflecting, Analyzing, Thinking, Deciding, Acting, Initiating, and Balancing.²⁵ They note that “each [style] brings its own joys and satisfactions, presents its own challenges, and brings the learner to a different place.”²⁶ Peterson and Kolb go on to explain that a person’s learning style is a person’s own “dynamic way of navigating the learning cycle, a way that emphasizes some parts of the learning cycle of experiencing, reflecting, thinking and acting over others.”²⁷ These authors continue in detailing the activity that is prevalent in each learning style and the strengths and weaknesses inherent in each. Although people are not constrained to only these styles, there are some that are dominate, and this differs for each individual. Understanding these learning styles, capabilities, and preferences will be key to developing appropriate

²⁴ Kay Peterson and David A. Kolb, *How You Learn Is How You Live: Using Nine Ways of Learning to Transform Your Life* (San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2017), location 134, Kindle.

²⁵ Peterson and Kolb, *How You Learn Is How You Live*, locations 39-40, Kindle.

²⁶ Peterson and Kolb, *How You Learn Is How You Live*, location 159, Kindle.

²⁷ Peterson and Kolb, *How You Learn Is How You Live*, location 34, Kindle.

technology interfaces for those the church desires to reach and help to grow in discipleship.

Faith and Religion

Ronald Goldman

As the secular world became more adept at identifying characteristics of how humans learn and grow, religious scholars and Christian educators began to question how the theories at play could be applied to religious growth and development as well as the impact that this would have on persons' abilities to have, express, and live into their faith. Ronald Goldman (1922-), an educator from England, was key to this movement. In his book *Readiness for Religion*, he states,

It is difficult enough, over a long period of study, to understand the Bible for oneself. It is even more difficult to be able to translate what the Bible has to say to the limited experience of children of varying ages. I suggest that it is an impossible task to teach the Bible as such to children much before adolescence...²⁸

Goldman built his research and theory on the work of Jean Piaget, and his stages of religious readiness and growth parallel the stages of Piaget. He listed three stages of religious development: Pre-religious, Sub-religious, and Personal Religious.²⁹ The Pre-Religious Stage for Goldman parallels Piaget's Pre-operational Stage, Sub-religious parallels Piaget's Concrete Stage, and Personal Religious parallels Piaget's Formal Stage.

²⁸ Ronald Goldman, *Readiness for Religion: A Basis for Developmental Religious Education* (London, UK: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966), 8.

²⁹ Goldman, *Readiness for Religion*, 23-24.

Through his own research, Goldman focused on children's understanding of religious concepts to expand upon the knowledge gleaned from Piaget. Religious understanding requires an understanding of theology, and Goldman used the theological writings of Paul Tillich to inform his work.³⁰ To expand the possibilities of teaching religious concepts in the classroom, Goldman looked to the teaching styles Jesus practiced in the gospels. He notes, "Think of the real-life experiences of which Christ's teachings speak, from which many stories emerge, and many sayings originated...an appeal to experience was central to his teaching. He did not talk about religion. He talked about life, but compelled people to see it in a new and demanding context."³¹ Goldman quotes Professor Paul Torrance as stating,

As a teacher, Jesus also aroused the curiosity of others. People asked him many questions. He always treated their questions with respect and helped them find the answers. Of course, he may have answered their questions by asking them several of his own, to make them think. Jesus recognised thoroughly and acted upon the old law of teaching, 'Excite and direct the self-activities of the learner, and tell him nothing he can learn for himself.' Instead of giving ready-made solution Jesus threw people back on their own resources.³²

From these understandings of learning and religion, Goldman states that "Religious growth is not something separate from the rest of a child's development. It is an interpretation of all his experiences, which he relates to what he believes to be the nature of the divine."³³ Goldman's theories, like Piaget's, have come under critique after more research and the reality of the complexity of educational needs and styles advanced, but the seminal work remains a foundation for continuing analysis and exploration.

³⁰ Goldman, *Readiness for Religion*, 221-222.

³¹ Goldman, *Readiness for Religion*, 222.

³² Goldman, *Readiness for Religion*, 223.

³³ Goldman, *Readiness for Religion*, 26.

James W. Fowler

James W. Fowler (1940-2015) was a theologian and professor of ethics and considered, along with others such as Kohlberg, “as a seminal figure in the field of developmental psychology.”³⁴ Through his research, he identified one pre-stage and six stages of faith: “Undifferentiated Faith, Stage 1: Intuitive-Projective Faith, Stage 2: Mythic-Literal Faith, Stage 3: Synthetic-Conventional Faith, Stage 4: Individuative-Reflective Faith, Stage 5: Conjunctive Faith, Stage 6: Universalizing Faith.”³⁵

Fowler explains each of the stages in depth in his book, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning* and makes a distinction between faith and religion. He writes that,

Faith, at once deeper and more personal than religion, is the person’s or group’s way of responding to transcendent value and power as perceived and grasped through the forms of the cumulative tradition. Faith and religion, in this view, are reciprocal. Each is dynamic; each grows or is renewed through its interaction with the other.³⁶

Undifferentiated Faith occurs in the very beginning of one’s life as the infant

“unconsciously forms a disposition toward its world.”³⁷ Fowler notes that,

Trust, courage, hope, and love are fused in an undifferentiated way and contend with sensed threats of abandonment, inconsistencies, and deprivations in the infant’s environment. Though really as prestige, and largely inaccessible to empirical inquiry of the kind we pursue, the quality of mutuality and the strength of trust, autonomy, hope, and courage (or their opposites) developed in this phase, underlie (or undermine) all that comes later in faith development.³⁸

³⁴ James W. Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning* (New York, NY: HarperOne, 1981), back cover.

³⁵ Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, vii-viii.

³⁶ Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 9.

³⁷ Munsey, *Moral Development, Moral Education, and Kohlberg*, 144.

³⁸ Munsey, *Moral Development, Moral Education, and Kohlberg*, 144.

As the child grows, the child moves into the first measurable stage of faith, which is Intuitive-Projective Faith. Building upon and in conversation with theorists mentioned earlier in this chapter as well as his own research, Fowler assigns this stage to children ages three to seven. He describes this stage saying, “This is the stage of first self-awareness. The ‘self-aware’ child is ego-centric as regards the perspectives of others.”³⁹

In the Mythic-Literal stage, “the person begins to take on for himself or herself the stories, beliefs, and observances which symbolize belonging to his or her community. Beliefs are appropriated with literal interpretations, as are moral rules and attitudes. Symbols are taken as one-dimensional and literal in meaning.”⁴⁰ Stage three brings what Fowler describes as Synthetic-Conventional Faith, which comes about as the person’s outlook expands through interaction with and through the demands of groups and entities beyond the family. Fowler notes that “Faith must provide a coherent orientation in the midst of that more complex and diverse range of involvements. Faith must synthesize values and information; it must provide a basis for identity and outlook.”⁴¹ This stage commonly begins in adolescence but may continue throughout life as the permanent faith stage for the individual.

Stage four—Individualistic-Reflective Faith—is the stage most common in young adults, although Fowler notes, “let us remember that many adults do *not* construct it and that for a significant group it emerges only in the mid-thirties or forties.”⁴² This will be

³⁹ Munsey, *Moral Development, Moral Education, and Kohlberg*, 145.

⁴⁰ Munsey, *Moral Development, Moral Education, and Kohlberg*, 145.

⁴¹ Munsey, *Moral Development, Moral Education, and Kohlberg*, 146.

⁴² Munsey, *Moral Development, Moral Education, and Kohlberg*, 147.

important to remember as technologies are formed or implemented to be used with young adults. Fowler goes on to say that,

This stage is marked by a double development. The self...now claims an identity no longer defined by the composite of one's roles or meanings to others. To sustain that new identity, it composes a meaning frame conscious of its own boundaries and interconnections, and aware of itself as a 'worldview.'⁴³

Stages five and six occur later in life with Fowler noting that stage five rarely occurs before middle age. As a person reaches stage four, there is an awakening to one's "social unconscious – the myths, ideal images, and prejudices built deeply into the self-system by virtue of one's being nurtured within a particular social class, religious tradition, ethnic group, or the like."⁴⁴ Fowler adds that this stage is "alive to paradox and the truth in apparent contradictions [and that] this stage strives to unify opposites in mind and experience."⁴⁵ Stage six is even rarer than stage five and Fowler describes it in this way:

The persons best described by this stage have generated faith compositions in which their felt sense of an ultimate environment is inclusive of all being. They become incarnators and actualizers of the spirit of a fulfilled human community...The rare persons who may be described by this stage have a special grace that makes them seem more lucid, more simple, and yet somehow more fully human than the rest of us. Their community is universal in extent...Such persons are ready for fellowship with persons at any of the other stages and from any other faith tradition.⁴⁶

Through studying and understanding these stages of faith in relation to other cognitive and moral development theories, it is possible to frame technologies for discipleship in ways that will best reach the target audience. This will allow participants to begin where they are in their own development and grow from there as they desire.

⁴³ Munsey, *Moral Development, Moral Education, and Kohlberg*, 147.

⁴⁴ Munsey, *Moral Development, Moral Education, and Kohlberg*, 148.

⁴⁵ Munsey, *Moral Development, Moral Education, and Kohlberg*, 148.

⁴⁶ Munsey, *Moral Development, Moral Education, and Kohlberg*, 149.

John H. Westerhoff III

John H. Westerhoff III (1933-) is a noted Christian educator as well as an ordained minister and was a professor at Duke University Divinity School. In his work, Westerhoff uses the information from the various theories and applies them to the real world with a focus on Christian education. He puts all the information together in usable challenges to churches to break the strictures of traditional church school based on the public education structures and free themselves for the working of the Holy Spirit. This is possible by using the knowledge and insight gained from developmental theories, cognitive learning stages, and experiential learning to move in ways that are creative and applicable to their own contexts and realities.

At the end of the latest revision of his book *Will Our Children Have Faith?*, he notes,

It was Tertullian, the fifth-century bishop of Hippo and theologian, who wrote, “Christians are made not born.” That was a very radical idea. Those who accepted this belief in Jesus as the Christ wanted to know how to be disciples. The answer in Greek was “catechesis” literally “to echo,” in this case to echo the Word, the Word being a person, Jesus. It was a life-long process of “Christening,” that is, influencing the development of Christ-like persons. How that was to be accomplished needed to be related to the ever-changing historical, social, cultural context in which the church found itself.⁴⁷

That this ‘Christening,’ to use Westerhoff’s term, could be ever-changing and free from the burdensome requirements and ever-changing regulations of the secular school system was a revolutionary idea that brought new life to those who embraced its possibilities. As Westerhoff explains,

Using the radical nature and character of a faith community as the context or place for Christian education means using every aspect of our church’s life for education...It means examining and judging our total life as a community of faith

⁴⁷ John H. Westerhoff III, *Will Our Children Have Faith?* 3rd rev. ed. (New York, NY: Morehouse Publishing, 2012), ch. “A Memoir,” location 2375, Kindle.

to see how well we live and transmit our Christian story or tradition, how well we minister to the total needs of whole persons in community, and how well we prepare and motivate individuals and communities to act on behalf of God's coming community in the world.⁴⁸

Through examining Westerhoff's recommendations and observations, Christian education in the local churches that chose to follow his lead were transformed into places that were able to reach, lead to faith, and deeply disciple those in attendance. People were called upon to live dynamically into their faith and teachers challenged individuals to grow as members of the Body of Christ.

Christian Smith

Christian Smith (1960-) is a researcher and sociologist currently serving as a professor of sociology at the University of Notre Dame. His research through the National Study of Youth and Religion used both phone and face-to-face interviews with youth and then young adults in the United States to learn about their outlooks and experiences in life, especially their views of religion, beliefs, and participation in religious activities. A description of the research methods follows:

From July 2002 to March 2003, the NSYR conducted a national, random digital telephone survey of U.S. households containing at least one teenager age 13–17, surveying one household parent for about 30 minutes and one randomly selected household teen for about 50 minutes. Then, in the spring and summer of 2003, 17 trained project researchers conducted 267 in-depth, face-to-face interviews with a subsample of telephone survey respondents in 45 states.⁴⁹

The results and analysis of this research were published in the book, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers*, published in 2005. A second set of

⁴⁸ Westerhoff, *Will Our Children Have Faith?*, location 1217, Kindle.

⁴⁹ Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2005), 6.

interviews took place in 2005, and a third set from 2007-2008. From this third set of interviews with the same interviewees (although less in number as some were no longer available to researchers) who were by then young adults.⁵⁰ The results of these interviews were examined in the book, *Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults*.

Smith explains his use of the term ‘emerging adults’ by noting that changes in society have “combined to create a new phase in the American life course.”⁵¹ He highlights four of these changes as having major impacts on the growth and development of young adults ages eighteen through twenty-nine.

First is the dramatic growth of higher education . . . A second and related social change crucial to the rise of emerging adulthood is the delay of marriage by American youth over the last decades . . . [M]any youth today face almost a decade between high school graduation and marriage to spend exploring life’s many options as singles, in unprecedented freedom. A third major social transformation contributing to the rise of emerging adulthood as a distinct life phase concerns changes in the American and global economy that undermine stable, lifelong careers and replace them instead with careers with lower security, more frequent job changes, and an ongoing need for new training and education . . . Fourth, and partly as a response to all of the foregoing, parents of today’s youth, aware of the resources it often takes to succeed, seem increasingly willing to extend financial and other support to their children, well into their twenties and perhaps early thirties.⁵²

Smith goes on to explain that due to these changes, a new descriptive term is needed for this stage of life. He has chosen the term ‘emerging adulthood’ used by psychologist Jeffrey Arnett explaining:

It recognizes the very unique characteristics of this new and particular phase of life. The features marking this stage are intense identity exploration, instability, a

⁵⁰ Christian Smith and Patricia Snell, *Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2009), 4.

⁵¹ Smith and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, 4.

⁵² Smith and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, 4-6.

focus on self, feeling in limbo or in transition or in between, and a sense of possibilities, opportunities, and unparalleled hope. These, of course, are also often accompanied—as we will show—by large doses of transience, confusion, anxiety, self-obsession, melodrama, conflict, disappointment, and sometimes emotional devastation.⁵³

The studies he and his team, as well as others, have done have indicated that a new phase of life,

Between the teenage years and full-fledged adulthood, has emerged in American culture in recent decades—reshaping the meaning of self, youth, relationships, and life commitments as well as a variety of behaviors and dispositions among the young. As a result, life for many today between ages 18 and 30 years old, roughly, has morphed into a different experience from that of previous generations.⁵⁴

A key factor in this stage of life is the extension of “the transition from the teenage years to fully achieved adulthood [which] has stretched out into an extended stage . . . lasting upward of 12 or more years [which gives] emerging adults . . . a freedom that is historically unparalleled.”⁵⁵ Smith explains that,

The emerging adult years often entail repeated life disruptions, transitions, and distractions . . . These years involve complex processes of incorporating new relationships and experiences into ongoing, developing lives, while sustaining and renegotiating old relationships with parents, siblings, friends, former adult mentors, and others. . . Often an uncomfortable unevenness typifies this period, as emerging adults pursue lives with one foot in what seems like helpless dependence and another in what feels like complete autonomy and total responsibility.⁵⁶

Emerging adults are struggling to find their place in a world with few boundaries and overarching accommodations to the needs and realities of others. While in many ways this care for the life experiences and truths of others shows great progress, it also leaves

⁵³ Smith and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, 6.

⁵⁴ Smith and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, 6.

⁵⁵ Smith and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, 280.

⁵⁶ Smith and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, 280.

open the question of where truth lies, and if anything can actually be defined as truth.

Smith notes:

It is difficult if not impossible . . . to actually know anything objectively real or true that can be rationally maintained in a way that might require people actually to change their minds or lives. Emerging adults know quite well how they personally were raised in their families, and they know fairly well how they generally “feel” about things. But they are also aware that all knowledge and value are historically conditioned and culturally relative. And they have not, in our view, been equipped with the intellectual and moral tools to know what to do with that fact. So most simply choose to believe and live by whatever subjectively feels “right” to them, and to try not to seriously assess, much less criticize, anything else that anyone else has chosen to believe, feel, or do...One thought or opinion isn’t more defensible than any other. One way of life cannot claim to be better than others. Some moral beliefs may personally feel right, but no moral belief can rationally claim to be really true, because that implies criticizing or discounting other moral beliefs. And that would be rude, presumptuous, intolerant, and unfeeling.⁵⁷

Smith’s studies did show some encouraging information for religious entities that believe these emerging adults have given up on faith. Smith notes that “A little more than half of emerging adults remain quite stable in their levels of religious commitment and practice or lack thereof . . . The primary conclusion about emerging adult religion, therefore, is not one of change but of continuity.”⁵⁸ He also notes the continued importance of parents, mentors, and other adults in the lives of emerging adults, stating, “Of the many teenage-era factors that our study investigated as possible influences on emerging adult religious outcomes, one of the most powerful factors was the religious lives of their parents.”⁵⁹ He continues by saying,

Furthermore, it is not only parents who matter in forming the religion of emerging adults. Other nonparental adults in the lives of youth are often also important and, in certain circumstances, can actually “substitute” for

⁵⁷ Smith and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, 292-293.

⁵⁸ Smith and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, 282.

⁵⁹ Smith and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, 285.

parents as formative influences in the lives of youth . . . Whatever the case may be, the empirical evidence tells us that it does in fact matter for emerging adult religious outcomes whether or not youth have had nonparental adults in their religious congregations to whom they could turn for help and support. It matters whether or not teenagers have belonged to congregations offering youth groups that they actually liked and wanted to be part of. It matters whether or not teenagers have participated in adult-taught religious education classes, such as Sunday school. Adult engagement with, role modeling for, and formation of youth simply matters a great deal for how they turn out after they leave the teenage years.⁶⁰

The changes in lifestyle and challenges that have been presented to this generation of young adults also present challenges and potential changes to organized religion. Smith's work brings to light many realities of this age-group which are overlooked or unknown to the local church and dispels some commonly held beliefs and myths that have caused many churches to feel a hopelessness in reaching this age-group. There is hope, and there are ways to reach emerging adults if those seeking to do so will take the realities of this research into consideration.

Kenda Creasy Dean

Kenda Creasy Dean (1959-) is ordained in the United Methodist Church, a professor at Princeton Theological Seminary, and a researcher. She was a colleague with Christian Smith on the National Study of Youth and Religion and has also done research independently and research with others. In light of this research, she has written several books for churches, youth ministry leaders, and

⁶⁰ Smith and Snell, *Souls in Transition*, 285.

others lifting up the realities, needs, and future of youth ministry in the church and in society-at-large.

In her book, *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers Is Telling the American Church*, she begins by noting, “Let me save you some trouble. Here is the gist of what you are about to read: American young people are, theoretically, fine with religious faith—but it does not concern them very much, and it is not durable enough to survive long after they graduate from high school. One more thing: we’re responsible.”⁶¹ She goes on to point out, “the solution lies not in beefing up congregational youth programs or making worship more “cool” and attractive, but in modeling the kind of mature, passionate faith we say we want young people to have.”⁶² She continues to pursue this line of thought with multiple colleagues in the book, *Delighted: What Teenagers Are Teaching the Church About Joy*. The focus of this book builds on work Dean had published in her book, *Practicing Passion: Youth and the Quest for a Passionate Church*. The authors stress the need for sharing the full message of the gospel and allowing leaders, youth, and others in the congregation to experience the vulnerability as well as the passion and joy that grow out of a relationship with the living God.

“[J]oy jolts them awake and activates their sense that they are human beings ‘fully alive,’ This experience of freedom and movement bestows on young people an overwhelming, ecstatic sense of release—the delight of ‘not being contained.’ But it is often accompanied by practices of vulnerability that strip us of our protective layers that

⁶¹ Kenda Creasy Dean, *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers Is Telling the American Church* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2010), 3.

⁶² Dean, *Almost Christian*, 4.

mask God's delight in us and, therefore, our ability to delight in ourselves."⁶³ The authors go on to dive deeply into how joy is a central part of God's creation and connection to humanity. "To glimpse [God's goodness] in the life of another person is therefore to glimpse God already alive and at work in the life of that person. It requires only one thing: our capacity to approach the layers of another person with wonder. God's goodness is not earned; it is a gift already given."⁶⁴ It is this wonder and joy which will deepen faith as youth grow into young adults, and it is this wonder and joy which will strike a chord in congregations seeking a deeper and more joyous faith connection.

Conclusion

For the church to reach and disciple a new generation of God's people, it must be willing to reach out in new and different ways to approach people where they are and in ways they understand. In the early to mid-twentieth century, this often meant structuring their Sunday mornings to include Sunday school that followed the classroom style of the public school system. Near the end of the century, John Westerhoff and others called on the church to break the ties that bound it to the strict conformity to public education structures and become more Holy Spirit driven and personalized. In this new century, the church once again faces a challenge to bring the gospel to people. Once again, the Holy Spirit will be a driving force bringing new opportunities for faith communities to rise to the challenge, care for, and train those seeking a deeper faith understanding and expression. People continue to need God, to seek greater understanding and commitment,

⁶³ Kenda Creasy Dean et al., *Delighted: What Teenagers Are Teaching the Church About Joy* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2020), 2, Kindle.

⁶⁴ Dean et al., *Delighted*, 54, Kindle.

and to yearn for more in their lives. The church must create ways to reach them in the current societal realities.

In the biblical story of Philip and the Ethiopian, the Ethiopian wanted to learn and understand. He was at a stage of faith where he wanted more, yet no one took the time to explain and discuss what he yearned to know. Through the work of the Holy Spirit and the willingness of Philip, those questions were answered, and the Ethiopian's faith blossomed. In the time of the Second Great Awakening, those on the frontier and in other areas yearned for an understanding of God or a reawakening of a living faith. The work of the Holy Spirit and the willingness of those called to a new expression of ministry led to changed lives. Theologically, the Holy Spirit is always moving and calling to the church to reach those who need God's love and care as well as with those who do not know the presence of the Lord. Radical ministry in new and different ways is a hallmark of the Holy Spirit, but those in the church must be open to the Holy Spirit's presence and application. Finally, through the interdisciplinary field of human growth and development, the church can learn and understand how individuals in their congregations and communities grow and develop from birth through old age to create appropriate ministries to reach people in their various stages of growth and intergenerationally as a community of faith.

CHAPTER SIX

PROJECT ANALYSIS

Introduction

Making and shaping disciples of Jesus has been part of the call to Christians since Jesus called, empowered, and then commissioned the original disciples. Each generation and iteration of the church has found ways to do this through the resources available to them at the time. In early Christianity, word of mouth helped people come to faith, and then in-person instruction as well as letters sent from leaders helped educate and train believers in discipleship so that they could share the faith with others, teaching and blessing them in turn. As the church expanded and new technologies were developed, new discipleship resources were added. The printing press made it possible for Christians to have access to Bibles in their homes. As time went on, publishing houses were established which created and distributed lessons for believers so that they could deepen their faith and commitment. Missionaries were equipped to spread the faith throughout the world. Sunday schools were established, and training became more structured. Schools of religion and seminaries were created for those wanting a deeper knowledge and those called to leadership through ministry.

The internet and technologies associated with it are to the world today what the printing press was to the world of the fifteenth century. The possibilities for accessibility and creativity are endless, limited only by a person's imagination or lack thereof. Social

media, podcasts, media sharing sites, gaming, and apps all combine to expand the church's ability to reach people and the people's ability to grow and learn at times when they are available, rather than only when the church has a class or event scheduled. While technological applications cannot fully replace in-person interactions or the community one has in the physical church building or in worship—wherever it is held—the rise of COVID-19 and the ramifications the pandemic had on ministry have clearly shown the needs and possibilities for the use of technology in doing ministry in the twenty-first century. Churches that had minimal technology or a lack of online presence often found themselves scrambling to invest in and learn to use technologies which would best reach their congregations and allow ministry to continue when believers needed to be physically apart.

For the generation of young adults in congregations, using social media and other technologies is commonplace and a large part of their everyday life. The idea that someone must be present in a certain place and at a certain time is fine for parties, picnics, and other gatherings, but for many things, the idea is out-of-date and exclusionary. Those who work at the time of the church meeting or class are unavailable and left out. Those who have moved out-of-town but are still connected to the congregation are left out. Others who are interested in learning or serving but are not available at the appointed time are left out and marginalized. For these reasons and others, young adults are often missing at traditional church events and gatherings. All of this sets up a situation which can make it seem like younger adults are not as committed to the church as older adults.

This perception stems from the definition of commitment. For older generations, the way an individual showed their commitment to the church was to be physically present when the church had scheduled events, activities, and, especially, worship. In prior generations, a large portion of the general population was able to devote their time and energies to these ministries because of the realities of society at the time. Going back fifty years, many businesses were closed on Sunday mornings when most Christian churches held worship, which meant a large majority of congregations' members did not have to report to work and were available to attend services. The number of women in the workforce was much lower than it is now, which meant many women had the opportunity and time to develop and lead ministries in the local church. Children's sports teams were mainly through the schools or recreational departments in cities and towns, and rarely would have considered having games on Sunday mornings. This freed the family to all be present and to attend worship, Sunday school, and other programs as they chose.

It was during the decade of the 1970s that things noticeably began to change. Due to changing national policies and a change in culture, more women joined the workforce, the number of divorces rose, stores began changing operating hours, youth sports clubs and traveling teams became popular, and school requirements became more demanding. All these realities put new demands on people's schedules. As society moved into the 1980s and 1990s, the idea of having it all rose in society, but the reality was that no one could continue to do everything they had done before as well as add on all the new demands. The church often suffered not only in the decline of attendance on Sunday morning, but in facing the reality that people did not have the time they used to have to support the mission and ministry of the church. Adaptations needed to be made, but many

churches were reluctant to change and put the responsibility on the members to be more committed and keep things running.

The rise of the internet and user-friendly technologies has helped to bridge part of that gap and is poised to transform how ministry is done in the future. Accessibility is limited only by access to a piece of technology and the internet. Fortunately, there are many places which offer free WiFi accessibility; smart devices are becoming more available through schools; and many families—even in low-income areas—are finding ways to access technology on a regular basis. Internet access has become a need—not a privilege—in America. The rise of these new technologies provides ways for the church to reach and develop disciples of Jesus Christ. It is up to local churches, leaders, and members to find or create the best ways to use these technologies to deepen the faith and knowledge of those who would be disciples.

The foundational chapters of this study clearly show how God has been at work through all these developments and has laid the groundwork for new and different ministries. In the Biblical Foundations chapter, Philip was sent to meet the Ethiopian on a desert road. This was not the usual procedure and not what the disciples and early believers had been doing. Yet, the Angel of the Lord called, and Philip answered. He broke open the box the early believers had been in and followed the call to do something different. Philip met a man who was a eunuch and served the queen. The eunuch was a powerful and intelligent man who had been to Jerusalem but had not found the answers he sought. He was struggling to understand scripture on his own when Philip was told to come alongside him. Philip did as he was led, explaining the scripture passage, and sharing the good news of Jesus Christ. He gave such a powerful and faith-filled testimony

and instruction that the Ethiopian asked to be baptized. Philip baptized the Ethiopian and then was taken away, but the Ethiopian went on his way, rejoicing in the new faith he had found. The movement of the Holy Spirit had provided the answers for which the Ethiopian searched. The Ethiopian's conversion happened in a new and different way through the presence and leading of the Holy Spirit.

The Historical Foundations chapter again shows how the presence of the Holy Spirit, combined with believers who are willing to step out in faith and try new ways of doing things, can bring transformation and new life. In a time when the population of the new United States of America had begun to move west, when towns were not yet established and homesteads could be miles apart, a need was perceived for Christian evangelism and discipleship. Camp meetings began as a way to meet those needs and bring those without an established church in their location a means of coming to know God and or growing closer to God through repentance, worship, and discipleship. Those in established churches saw needs around them and throughout the new nation that needed to be addressed and formed organizations to fight for change and justice. As people grew in their independence, believers stepped out and empowered themselves to create new structures to better meet their needs and represent their own presence and power in Christianity. Creativity and empowerment through the presence of the Holy Spirit led the way in this transformative time in Christian history, as people took up the causes that meant the most to them. They took chances and thought out-of-the-box instead of staying with what had become normal for the time. By doing so, they expanded the faith and laid a foundation for a strong Christian presence in the frontier of the United States; caused Americans to face social issues and injustices; and made new

denominations, where people who had been marginalized were able to proclaim the faith in the fullness of the Holy Spirit, knowing they were full children of God. They took risks and stepped out in faith, which is a key need today.

Theologically, the presence and guidance of the Holy Spirit has been central to the movement of God's people through the ages. Nothing vital for the Kingdom of God can be done without the breath and fire of the Holy Spirit's blessing and call. Too often in mainline denominations, the Holy Spirit has been sidelined or forgotten and people have become deaf to the Spirit's voice. It is vital that the church today reconnect with the Holy Spirit, learning who the Holy Spirit is and how the Holy Spirit works. By reconnecting, believers will again begin to hear and acknowledge the Holy Spirit's voice as it calls them to new and groundbreaking ministries that will transform lives. The Holy Spirit has been a key part of this doctoral process. It was through the calling of the Holy Spirit that my studies began; it is through the power of the Holy Spirit that they have continued to this point; it is through the revelation of the Holy Spirit and a process of discernment that decisions for the project have been made; and it will be through the working of the Holy Spirit that people's lives are transformed.

In reaching out to others to train disciples and deepen faith, it is important to understand how individuals learn and grow. The field of education—specifically, the area of human growth and development—is key to developing apps, activities, and curricula that are appropriate to the age and level of knowledge of the participants. Needs change as people age or confront different aspects of life, so it is crucial that the platforms created for growing disciples meet them where they are and provide an impetus for growth. This can be done through learning about various stages of life and common

capabilities during those stages, as well as discovering the styles and ways people understand the world and interact with others. This information will be a foundational need as leaders begin considering and developing new online ministries, platforms, and technologies to assess the technology's practicality and appropriateness for the intended audience. While the church can and should learn from this field of study, it has one key advantage that traditional schools, colleges, universities, and seminaries do not. Due to the structure and requirements of licensing bodies and governmental entities, schools and institutions of higher learning are restricted and often hampered when developing and implementing new technologies. Churches—while still having to do due diligence and keep safety policies in mind—have an advantage of being able to create and implement new ideas on a much faster timeline. Once an app or media platform has been developed, people can have access to it immediately. The only limit is accessibility and the limits placed on it by the creator.

The congregation at Henrietta United Methodist Church is eager to explore the possibilities for ministry and outreach that this project represents. They have spent their whole history as a church adapting and being led by the Spirit of God. When a challenge comes up, such as needing a new parsonage, they find a solution and care enough to see it through. They currently add missions and ministries as the Spirit calls and moves them and are eager to come alongside this project and explore the possibilities for ministry to young adults throughout our area and in the wider world.

Methodology

This project included surveys, interviews, journaling, hard copy and technology resources, and an opportunity for an in-person meeting at a local restaurant. Recruitment was done by phone calls, announcements in the Henrietta United Methodist Church bulletin and newsletter, as well as social media posts. There was a dedicated website for this study. Journals and other hard copy resources were provided through the mail or delivered personally. Email was used for most ongoing communication. Mid-study interviews were held by Zoom, and closing interviews were on Zoom or in person with a Meet-up opportunity at the Panera restaurant in Lakewood, Ohio which was a central place for local participants. Pre-Project and Post-Project Surveys were made available on Surveymonkey.com with links shared to participants.

The Pre-Project Survey [Appendix G] and Post-Project Survey [Appendix G] were created to gather information on where those surveyed saw themselves in relation to their faith. The surveys also provided demographic information. Usernames were created to compare the surveys and look for change from the beginning of the study to the end in certain areas. This goal was only partially realized as many participants forgot their usernames by the time of the post-project survey, and some never created them. The Post-Project Survey also questioned participants on their choices during the study and their evaluations of the options provided. The surveys were anonymous to provide participants with the freedom to answer candidly.

Interviews with the participants occurred in the middle weeks of the project and at the end. The mid-study interviews provided an opportunity to check in and see how the technology and options were and were not working for each participant. It also provided

a chance to get to know each other and have conversation which helped build our relationship. These conversations also provided an opportunity for participants to ask questions and for me to make suggestions, especially when it came to option choices and journaling.

Hard copy journals were provided for each participant to record their thoughts. They were free to comment on the study option they had chosen; things that were on their mind that day, or anything else that suited them. Some prompts were provided in each of the options for participants to ponder, but whether they shared the ideas in their journals was up to the individual. They were free to use their own styles and make the journal truly their own voice. The journals were anonymous to allow candid thoughts, observations, and revelations. This proved very helpful and enlightening as will be shared later in this chapter. Some of the entries were very raw and real providing insight into where the person was and how their faith did or did not speak to their needs.

Implementation

Seeking out and recruiting people to participate in this research took place in various ways. The March newsletter and bulletins for Henrietta United Methodist Church included announcements explaining the project and asking for participants. Recruitment outside of the church began the week of March 21, 2022, with social media posts inviting interested persons to take the pre-project survey. The posts and survey also provided a link to register to participate in the project. Once a person registered, they received an email [Appendix D] welcoming them to the project, giving some details, and asking them to complete and return the Consent Form [Appendix F]. A Welcome Box was then

mailed to each participant which included a letter [Appendix E], two books (*The Walk* by Adam Hamilton and *Good Enough* by Kate Bowler and Jessica Richie), a journal, and a wooden prayer cross. Eighteen people registered and sixteen were accepted into the study which began on March 25, 2022. (Two people who registered were outside the age limit for the study.)

Participants were asked to spend one hour a week focusing on at least one of three discipleship topics. The three discipleship choices were Exploring Christianity, Daily Prayer and Reflection, and Learning, Serving, and Growing. Exploring Christianity used the book, *The Walk*, written by Adam Hamilton for a Bible study. Daily Prayer and Reflection used the book, *Good Enough*, written by Kate Bowler and Jessica Richie for daily devotions and provided suggestions for two daily devotional apps which participants could download. Learning, Serving, and Growing highlighted the mission and ministry of Spirit Lake Ministry Center in North Dakota. The home website for the project was www.godsunknownchurch.com. The website was updated each week with new information and/or guided questions for journaling. Participants were asked to journal their thoughts as they went through the program and then return the journal when the study ended. A return postage paid envelope was included in the Welcome Box for that purpose.

Journals were each labelled with usernames connected to a participant. A colleague kept the key to username to participant so that the information in the journals would be anonymous to me. This information was shared with study participants. The study ended on May 7, 2022, and participants were asked to mail back their journals on

that date. Fourteen journals were returned. One participant indicated she had not written in her journal, so it was not returned. The other never arrived.

Midway through the study, I interviewed each participant asking them the following questions:

- Which discipleship option or options are you using?
- How is it/are they working for you?
- What are some things you have discovered?
- What have you liked and disliked?
- You are a little over halfway through the study. What are you looking forward to in the final weeks?
- How is journaling going?
- What questions do you have for me?

Concluding interviews occurred from Friday, May 7, 2022, through Friday, May 13, 2022. All participants were involved in closing interviews. The questions asked in the interviews were:

- How was the process of the study for you?
- Which focus/discipleship topic or topics did you use?
- What were the pros and cons for you?
- Were there any surprises?
- Do you have suggestions to improve the study?
- If a local church were doing this, what would you suggest?

Each participant was also thanked for their participation, reminded to return their journal, and reminded to take the end of study survey on [surveymonkey.com](https://www.surveymonkey.com). Of the sixteen participants, ten completed the end of study survey by Sunday, May 15, 2022.

Summary of Learning

There were sixteen participants in the study. Participants ranged in age from nineteen through forty. Appendix J gives a breakdown of the participants ages. There were thirteen women and three men. Three were single, never married; two were divorced with children; six were married with no children; and five were married or living with a significant other with children. Five were working on post-baccalaureate degrees. Fourteen were working outside of the home when the study began, and one began a new job during the study going from a stay-at-home parent to a job outside the home. All indicated their lives were hectic and that it was hard to make time for everything they needed and wanted to do. Connecting for our interviews, even digitally, was a challenge as many needed to be rescheduled several times. Even so, each participant indicated a need and desire to explore their faith and grow closer to God.

Bible study, as well as focusing on prayer and devotional time, were the most popular of the three focus topics with Adam Hamilton's *The Walk* having the most varied responses ranging from people who appreciated what Hamilton had to say to people who felt he was talking down to them and very judgmental. Two participants stopped reading *The Walk* and changed to *Good Enough*, the devotional book by Kate Bowler and Jessica Richie. The convenience and flexibility of the prayer and devotion apps *Lectio365* and *Everyday Sanctuary* were appreciated by the participants who used them. They mentioned the convenience of being able to pull the devotions up on their phones as they had time and the ability to set reminders for themselves throughout the day which helped keep them on track. At least one participant also began listening to podcasts offered by

Everyday Sanctuary and would have liked to have more of them to listen to on her long commute to work.

Concerns have been raised regarding changing attendance patterns in churches, especially in mainline denominations for quite a few years now. COVID-19 exacerbated this, and even churches which have returned to a consistent schedule of in-person worship and activities have found attendance and participation down from pre-COVID-19 numbers. The realities of the pandemic in the United States caused many people to reassess their lives and priorities. Individuals and families found their lives unexpectedly changed, having to constantly regroup and adjust plans during lockdowns, illness, vaccine/masking controversies, and job changes. Young adults were affected by this at a time in their lives when they were establishing their own paths and priorities. High school, college, and graduate level learning were adapted to the needs of the day changing the traditional experiences and expectations of those involved. Employment became inconsistent for many and more demanding for others as hours were cut or added and some positions moved from an office into the home. In the aftermath, church attendance has been less of a priority for many people.

While church members of older generations wring their hands and worry about the priorities and faith of the next generation, the young adult members and neighbors of the churches are doing their best to find their way and to provide for their own lives and for their families. As indicated by the study participants, schedules are so hectic, they have trouble finding time to even take a breath. Singles, couples, and couples with children in the study all expressed the desire to grow closer to God and yet also noted the reality of not having a consistent day-to-day schedule that would assist them in making

this a routine focus. The young adults in the study are employed (some at multiple jobs), in school pursuing college and graduate degrees, and raising children in a time when rules governing society change with the newest COVID-19 variant and infection numbers. Housing issues have also brought challenges. One participant moved back home with her parents as the study began. Three were looking for homes or apartments during the study and finding the search a struggle as they were priced out of units which until recently would have been affordable or did not act fast enough and found the desired home had been sold before they could submit a bid.

The reality for this generation at this time is that the rules and realities of society have changed and are changing, and they must adapt quickly to be able to function. Although each participant faced different issues, all of them had lives in some form of upheaval during the time of the study. One participant was in the process of selling their home and buying a new one when the family came down with COVID-19. Another participant started the project as a stay-at-home parent and then went back to work at a full-time job in the middle of the project. A third participant who was very excited to be a part of the study was also taking classes for a specialty master's degree (already having a doctorate in the field) and found herself lacking time to do even the basics of the study in the beginning. It is easy for outsiders (especially those in older generations) to see young adults' busy-ness and make judgements based on life as it was when they were young adults, but judgment is not what this group needs. Based on their interviews and journal entries, this generation already feels judged enough and is under a great deal of pressure both from outside sources and from themselves.

The participants and those in their generation need the church's understanding, care, and flexibility. They need leadership and members who take a vested interest in them - not making demands on them, but just loving them where they are and taking an interest in their lives. Finding the needs of those in and around the local church and discovering ways to meet those needs will be a key facet of ministry with this age group. They have not abandoned faith. They have been burdened with a life that no longer respects rest or individual schedules. The church needs to be willing to hear their needs, struggles, and desires. It will need to build relationships individually actually taking the time to hear the needs and interests, instead of assuming what this generations wants or needs based on past generations or past ministries.

This project indicated that young adults have a desire to explore and grow in their faith and to learn more in many areas. They also have a deep desire to make a difference in the world. One area where these two ideas intertwine is in charitable giving. For these young adults, money and giving has a specific and focused purpose. They want to understand the cause and know how their donations will be used. The idea of giving to the church because it is a church does not hold the same weight as it did in previous generations. Young adults want to know exactly where their money is going, that it is being used responsibly, and that it is making an impact. While many agree that supporting the church is important, they want to know that their offerings are being used wisely and making a difference in the world. If the money is helping to pay the electric bill, how is the building being used that makes this bill worthwhile to the ministry? They work hard for their money and make many family sacrifices to earn it, so they want to make sure it is well-spent. Some participants indicated they give to various secular

charities which speak deeply to them and which they know they can trust. They care about the cause and can verify that their money is being put to good use. While some churches do a good job of highlighting their missions and ministries, and are transparent about how their budget is used, it is an area where congregations as well as denominations could improve. Sharing the needs and how the financial contributions help meet those needs whether locally, regionally, nationally, or globally will be helpful as this age group makes giving decisions.

Interviewing the participants revealed a growing awareness for some of how focusing on God and faith through daily practices made a difference in their lives helping them to spend time relaxing into a spiritual connection that was meaningful to them and affected their daily lives. For others, the attempt to add spiritual practices created frustration in lives that were already overwhelming. One participant noted that trying to read while caring for children was too chaotic and not working but did hold out hope that the apps might be a better option.

Insights from Journal Entries

While the interviews and surveys were helpful and gave a good deal of information, it was the journal entries which proved the most insightful and revealing. Entries ranged from positive and negative comments about the books, journaling, and research to heartbreakingly honest revelations about personal struggles; how they see and feel about themselves; and how they view God. Some of the theological struggles are common and have been debated since Christianity began such as ‘Why does God allow bad things to happen to people?’ while others reflect a painful interpretation of what it

takes to live up to the church's expectation of a 'good' Christian. The sections which follow are journal entries in the participant's own words. Identifying information has been redacted, but grammar, spelling, and other specifics have been left as written so each author's voice comes through.

For this section, journals were randomly given a letter of the alphabet which was not connected in any way to their username or any other identifiers. As a reminder, each participant received a journal and an addressed postage paid envelope for its return. Out of the sixteen participants, fourteen journals were returned. The journals included reflections on the specific topic focus chosen as well as other thoughts and feelings. The following are insights gleaned from journal entries representing uplifting or positive entries, negative or heartbreaking entries, and insightful entries that gave glimpses into the lives of the participants.

Uplifting or Positive

A – “Dance with me God. Show me the pleasures in the everyday loveliness of the world you created.”¹

A – “Let us count not only our blessings, but our losses.”²

Acknowledgement of loss helps us to move forward and grow from each experience. Honesty of these experiences helps push us forward into renewed hope for the future. But taking the needed time to mourn gives us the strength we need to move

¹ Kate Bowler and Jessica Richie, *Good Enough: 40ish Devotionals for a Life of Imperfection* (New York, NY: Convergent Books, 2022), 13.

² Bowler and Richie, *Good Enough*, 16.

forward. Each experience is part of our story. “Blessed are we who mourn . . . that mourning might be to our hearts the greatest springtime.”³

B – Really enjoying Lectio365 – break – relax – connect – have learned something new every day – option to remind me to pray set it up for morning devotion.

C – I really need to get back into a Bible study. I really enjoyed that before because you can always learn new things about Jesus, and he also helps you grow as a person.

E – For lunch today I decided to write in my journal. I’ve been praying very hard for my best friend who was diagnosed with breast cancer 2 yrs. ago. Today she found out that she’s cancer free!!! [heart drawing] This was a moment where I witnessed God and the power of prayer.

E – It feels good to pray, it’s like a quiet therapy session with God.

G – Dear Lord God, Wow! This is the first time that I have truly set aside time to connect with you, pray, read your word, journal, and just slow down. It is refreshing. There are so many pursuits and responsibilities on my plate that I forgot my first one: Follow You.

H – I believe there are times when the Holy Spirit has reached out and whispered to me. An example would be this project. Just when I thought I couldn’t go on anymore or that I needed to get back into scripture and my walk with God, this opportunity came along.

I – Worship and praise should be like a homecoming. Not a requirement to appease the Creator. One of the beautiful things about humans is that we get to choose

³ Bowler and Richie, *Good Enough*, 18.

what we do; there is some level of instinctual drive that may influence some decisions, but ultimately – we get to choose. Why worship? Because we recognize that God is our Creator, we are grateful, and the only way we can show that is choosing to give thanks and praise.

J – I LOVE to sing. This is definitely a part of most worship, I just wish it were MORE! We used to sing 3 songs every week at church, now it is just 2. [smiley face] I find it is the way I most truly express myself to God. The lyrics in some (many) of the hymns are so beautiful & so often manage to grasp exactly how we're feeling. There's never enough music!!

J – I think the more kind I could be, the happier I would be. There is really no better feeling than being kind to others. We would all lead better, healthier, happier lives if we were more kind. [heart drawing]

K – [Reflecting on Psalm 95] It's beautifully simple. As God's creation we give praise and thank God and do our best to care for all of God's creations. Worshipping God is good and joyful.

K – I truly think God doesn't care whether or not we call ourselves Christians. God just wants us to love and do good for all. This is why I love my church so much. We fight for equal rights and acceptance for all.

K – [Reflecting on prayer] Last summer I was talking with my pastor and this subject came up. She told me that she has ADHD and because of that she struggled to be focused in prayer. She told me that instead of having "sessions" of prayer, she considers her life to be a sort of prayer. She talks to God throughout the day and prays for different

things and people whenever it comes to her. So, I tried it and it's been extremely helpful. I feel very lucky to be close to my pastor and that she is so open and honest.

Negative or Heartbreaking

B – Good Enough entry 3 Mourning a future self

How many times in my life have I been grieving and not realized?

How many times in the last two years/three years have futures “dissolved before [my] eyes”?⁴

B – Good Enough chapter 16 The Bad Thing.

I have definitely felt like “the bad thing” especially in recent years. (When we get together is there anything I can talk about that isn't my complaints about my living situation, toxic [family member], discomfort.) But I also am not one suffering deeply from physical problems, but I try my hardest to be there for those people and it takes a lot of energy and thankfulness to be there in those moments to support and listen. But it matters.

D – I have started reading *The Walk* and thinking about what I do well as a Christian, and where I fall short. I do a lot of the things I feel I should do. I wake up in the morning and I thank God that I had some sleep (even if I tossed and turned most of the night). I fall short by not getting on my knees to pray as I usually pray while brushing my teeth, showering, getting dressed, and driving to work I do pray. But more than that – I talk to God all day.

⁴ Bowler and Richie, *Good Enough*, 15.

D – My [teenage] son decided to go live with his father 3 years ago – I have a lot to be sad about. I have been heart-broken and devastated – As I write this – I feel I’m wrong about how long it’s been – It can’t have been that long? My son was my life.

D – I haven’t even read *Good Enough* yet. I work 2 jobs . . . I have a reason for working so many jobs. The [first job] makes me happy. They give me no hours and I drive far -, But the lady [name] that I work with is the greatest and she gets stressed and is human – like the rest of us – but she is the kindest, most wonderful person I know. This week [person’s name]’s sister killed herself. She has tried in the past. She had mental health problems her whole life = once again I am mad at God and I ask him WHY? People always say God needed them or it was their time to go. But I don’t understand. How can it be a child’s time to go? or when someone is murdered? I don’t like it . . . I am heartbroken for [person’s name] – who is left to clean up this mess – and I don’t even want to talk to God today. I still will – I will tell him how I feel and ask him why. I will then thank him for all that I am, and I have – but I will go to sleep hurt and angry.

E – Today I need to start the morning off with extra prayers. I’ve always felt bad or guilty if I prayed about myself. So today I pray that someone I love will stop drinking and saying hurtful things. I try not to let [loved one’s] words get to me but, last night, I couldn’t take it anymore. I woke up today feeling so sad and emotionally exhausted.

E – Why do bad things have to happen to people. I’ve had lots of times where I questioned why is God putting me through this. I know life can’t be unicorns and rainbows all the time . . . I sure do try to have it that way. But I just don’t understand why

people have to struggle to the point where they lose everything or end their life, why didn't their prayers get answered.

E – I sat with [identifier] today who knows he will not make it much longer and doesn't want to die. What do I say to him, he's already hurting and asked, "What did I do wrong for God to do this to me, why didn't he answer my prayers?" . . . I don't know if there is anything to say to make it better. All the prayers for this [person] and he's not going to make it. Why can't those prayers get answered?

G – Lately I have been overwhelmed by the pressure . . . of marriage, raising a [child] and taking care of a dog and house, managing school, managing work . . . people's expectations of me (family and friends) . . . it is all pressure. Father, I hand over the pressure, the yoke, the burden I feel to pick up your yoke. I want to pick up what you have for my life and not stress out about everything that life brings.

H – personally, I stereotype most Christians because of the "bad eggs" there are.

H – The more I saw the judgement from Christians, the more it turned me away. Christians are supposed to let God judge. He should be the only one to judge at the end of the day. I did not want to take part in something that was wrong. We are supposed to welcome people with open arms.

I – In a "traditional" worship or fellowship setting, I have always felt I needed to put on a front. The thinking was that if I was there, I could only add to the experience, do my part. If I sit back, then would others think I don't care, would they think less of me? There were so many pressures to live up to expectations and to give to the community in the same fashion as those that came before, that I felt crushed in the one space that was supposed to be freeing. But fear of not being as good or as useful enough made every

interaction a job. It no longer was about myself or my spiritual needs, but what I could give of myself for the benefit of others.

I – If I am not proving my worth with what I can give, then I am not worthy. And that feels like crap! And it probably is just a load of it. But that is where I’ve fallen on the scale every time I am in that space, so I have chosen to avoid it. Being stuck between “you are worthy just because you are” and “what can you do to further the kingdom of God” isn’t a great place to rebuild a foundation.

J – I feel like I’m very hesitant to share my faith, which I know sucks! I just feel like religion has a very bad rap these days and I constantly feel very judged. It can be hard to figure out a way to escape this.

K – As a child I felt so confused when hearing things like, listen to God, God will tell you your path, God will answer your prayers. I thought it was my problem, that I wasn’t listening or faithful enough. Over time I understood better but never lost that inner struggle, that I just do not know how to listen or interpret God. It is frustrating and interferes with my faith all the time.

L – [Reflecting on *The Walk* chapter One] Within the first couple of pages it already talks about how doing something every single day is essential . . . [expletive]. I know I can do it, but I already feel defeated.

L – I have realized through this that I’m kind of mean to myself, but like I wouldn’t treat anybody the way I treat myself sometimes [sad face].

L – I want to write all of the curse words. I did not finish either of the books. I kept forgetting to write in the journal AND I signed up to do this because I wanted to! I was excited for it! . . . I am sad I did not do more.

N – I feel weirdly uncomfortable in a church, I cannot explain it. I just felt like this. Does me not liking church mean I am a bad “Christian”?

Insightful

A – “Something lovely happens when we let go, live with less; give up something dear. We make up more room for God.”⁵ What can I give up to make more room for God?

B – I was not quite sure when this started, and I mistakenly planned a lot for the last/first week of April and have been running a mile a minute with good and stressful things. So for me a good place to start with this project is taking time to pause. I struggle with pausing, with thinking that busy = successful = productive = correct = right = not bad. But rest is important.

B – Morning devotions are easier to do. Routine is important, but I do not have to do everything all the time. Helpful for when I need a break.

C – I struggle with prayer. I am not saying I do not know what to say or judgmental it just has been a struggle of mine. I know it is not one of my spiritual talents or strengths but is something I want to work on in growing my faith.

D – I am reading the instructions, going on the website and trying to figure out how I fit into this research . . . it is interesting because I have been a believer in God, then a non-believer, and a believer again . . .

D – What is my purpose? I used to think I was put on this earth to be [name]’s mom . . . now I am not so certain. What do I do well? What am I here for? Where do I

⁵ Bowler and Richie, *Good Enough*, 147.

belong? Why am I here? What do I contribute? Am I a giver – or a taker? Is the world better because I'm here?

E – Tonight I thought about how this project has helped me get closer to finding out what God's big plans are for me. I was in a . . . [major] car accident [a few] years ago . . . Everyone said that God must have big plans for me since I did not die. Ever since then that is been on my mind all the time. Am I doing his big plan for me. What is it? After starting this project, I feel like I am closer to having that answer.

F – It is so hard to admit and come to terms with not being able to do everything. I want to do everything. I want everything to fall into place how I want it to. But it is not I want to be able to lament the life I thought I would have, to allow room for what my life can become. Room for God to do work and to hear from him which direction he wants me to go. God, you want me to lament. You want me to stop and redirect myself. Grief is good, an essential feeling.

H – I agree with the idea that our praise to God is found within everything we do. I think that worship is a continuous thing that should not be confined to an area or specific time. I think worship can also be just as simple as enjoying the outdoors and the nature he created.

H – I wish others were open to pray for one another with no judgement from others. This could help open one's heart to fully be capable of praying.

I – I have never responded well to devotionals or spiritual guidance reading that felt like an obligation, I have enough of those in my life, and I feel like my spirituality should be more like self-care; something I want to do because it feels good, not something I “need” to do because it is “the right thing to do.”

I – I have been avoiding using the apps and ignoring notifications. Not dismissing them, because if I start something, I should do my best to see it through. But that is easier said than done when it revolves around an area of yourself you have allowed to grow organically for years – taking teachings and beliefs from formative years and allowing that to be the foundation of adult spirituality but have not spent time in the traditional spheres of worship and praise. Am I going to put myself in a position to feel like a lesser being in God’s creation, “falling short of my potential” if I choose to just be?

I – I have not read anything additional because life has gotten in the way. Whenever this happens, I always tend to put myself or personal goals on the back burner to take care of others. This includes spiritual attention as well.

J – For a lot of my adult life I have continued to struggle w/ going to church simply because it is my only guaranteed day off. I tend to think of all the time it takes up, but not when I am there. I’m happy I’m there once I am. It is truly a recharge and for me really the most comfortable way to worship.

J – I have always loved the passage from Micah [Micah 6:8] – it’s hanging on a banner in my church! I think serving others has always been a struggle for me, not because I do not want to help people, but because it takes time and honestly, it can be really hard! I have managed to make this a part of my living. Not only am I in a position of offering kind acts and words to people all day long, but I spend my whole day meeting people where they are at. Basically, providing almost any level of service required of me, predominately to underprivileged people. It is incredibly hard work, but it feels so good after a long day, even if I only feel I have helped one person that day. I know God is using me in these people’s lives, even in small ways.

J – I do not . . . very often give to the church. I love my church, but sometimes I really feel there are better ways to help this world. I like to donate by giving to organizations that help to heal the Earth, help heal those with disease, and help those in need of food. I also like to give towards organizations my friends support.

K – I struggle with the Bible a lot. So many people use it to justify their hate, which is the exact opposite of what Jesus taught. While I do feel the Bible is a great guideline, I do not necessarily believe it is totally needed to be a good follower of Jesus. I feel God so much more in the people and beauty of the world.

K – I believe we are on this earth for each other not for ourselves. It is our duty to give to those who need and through that we find contentment.

K – [Reflecting on serving others] For me this is what Christianity is all about. I try every day to consider others and be a light for someone's darkness. I think that the "meaning of life" that people are always searching for is simple. Having and showing compassion and generosity for others.

L – Today I had my call with Pastor Joyce, and it went way better than I expected. She made everything so easy, and I think she said something along the lines of you are right, wherever you are. Even if she did not say that she made me feel it.

L – I really like how these devotions [*Good Enough*] have a section for the author to help guide our reflections . . . It . . . makes me miss things like Bible Study where you get to talk to other people about what they took away from the story or how they interpreted this part.

L – Although I did not finish, I do feel like I am in a different/better place than I was at the beginning. My hubby and I are back to reading some things together.

L – I have also got to talk about religion a little at work and there are a few people who thought all Christians are like Catholics/Mormons/Jews etc. Super strict and it was off putting to them. I wish I could have met some of these people when I was younger because I would have 100% brought them to youth group.

M – The way to get me to want to give \$ to the church is to show/tell me all the good the church is doing. The best way to turn me off to donating is to talk down to me & beat me over the head telling me I need to.

M – I started using the apps. The Everyday Sanctuary app seems ok. It is definitely easier to find time for the apps.

M – I read more of *Good Enough*. Being surrounded by chaos makes reading next to impossible, APPS ARE MUCH MORE MANAGEABLE!

N – I'm not gonna lie this is gonna be hard, I haven't prayed on a daily basis for quite some years now. Does God really hear our prayers?

N – Praying is easy but submerging yourself in this spiritual and religious healing is hard. Put God first and the rest shall follow.

Take-Aways

It is clear from the journal entries that the participants cared deeply about their lives and their participation in this research. Time was a factor named by almost all the participants at some time during the study. The demands of each day are overwhelming for many making it difficult for them to stop and take time for personal spiritual practices. Adding the fact that many see it as indulgent to focus on self rather than others, places deepening discipleship and self-care far down the priority list and even makes

many of them feel they are being selfish when they take time away from other responsibilities to spend focused time with God.

Each participant expressed a concern that they were not ‘measuring up’ to life’s demands. In pursuing this subject, it became clear that, for many, the definition of ‘measuring up’ meant doing everything in their life at almost perfection level with no grace given for times of excess pressure, upheaval, illness, or chaos. They feel a responsibility to perform at their maximum all the time. In addition, many felt that the church had the same, if not higher, expectations of them. Some have decided that since they cannot live up to their own expectations, they will no longer put themselves in a position to try to live up to the church’s expectations, let alone be judged by their faith community as failing to be good Christians.

While many feel a need for God and a Christian community, their experiences, observations, and perceptions have left them feeling inadequate. Not living up to their expectations outside of the church have increased those feelings of inadequacy as well. The more they feel they have missed the mark, so to speak, the more pressure they put on themselves to try harder. The pressure builds, the schedules and demands multiply, and the cycle continues. Young adults desperately need a safe space to release the pressure, recalibrate their expectations, and find some grace. The church is called to be a community of grace, acceptance, and love, but for many young adults that has not been their experience, so it is not a place to which they readily turn when in need.

Conclusion

The decline in church attendance has been a growing concern for churches in the United States. Especially concerning is the growing absence of young adults in the worship, activities, mission, and fellowship of the local church. [Appendix B] Old patterns of young people being absent post-high school and returning once they have children have changed. Societal and cultural expectations, history, and experiences with church congregations while they were being raised, and personal faith beliefs as well as other factors all play a role in this absence.

While the church may no longer be where young adults naturally turn, it is, however, uniquely equipped to meet the needs of young adults today. Local congregations are rarely bound by outside rules and restrictions and, therefore, have the freedom to create new and different ministries which directly address the needs of the population around them. Through denominations, regional associations, and, especially, local churches, there are resources and skill sets; a variety of experiences among the members; as well as liquid assets and grants which can be tapped for creating and deploying these ministries. The barrier to fully embracing the possibilities of new ministries, unfortunately, is often a reticence among members of local congregations to accept that this generation has different, but still devoted views of worship and faith. Too often, the lack of attendance in worship is met with judgement and a targeted offensive campaign to get young adults to realign their priorities and get back into the pews on Sunday mornings. The reality is that this will not work.

While a very small minority of young adults might respond to the attendance campaign, it is not a way to long term ministry with young adults. The realignment must

come in the thoughts and actions of the older church members themselves. They must intentionally work to become welcoming communities concerned for the needs of the next generations. Church members must put aside their preconceived notions of what 'church' has been and wrestle with the possibilities of what the 'church' can be. If worship on a Sunday morning is not where young adults are growing closer to God and deepening their faith, where can that happen? Where is the Holy Spirit at work during all that is changing? What new things are churches being called to create to reach young adults where they are, give them support, nurture them in the faith, walk with them through the struggle's life brings, and give them the hope and love of Jesus Christ? Churches must be willing to step out and do the work of getting to know the real faces behind the category 'young adult' and learn about the realities facing them.

The challenges facing this generation of young adults are similar to previous generations as they strike out on their own making decisions on employment, lifestyle, relationships, etc. However, this generation also faces daunting challenges as a pandemic, racial tensions, political divides, social expectations, and uncertainty infiltrate their lives. They have faced unprecedented decisions for the welfare of older generations as well as younger generations having to make decisions during a new illness where protocols and safety measures changed from week to week and from variant to variant. They have lost friends, co-workers, and family members to COVID-19 and often have not been able to gather to mourn the loved ones and engage in traditional farewell ceremonies. If they decided to mask, they were judged by one group. If they decided not to mask, they were judged by others. Once vaccines became available, the judgments continued.

The pressure has been daunting as they have tried to maneuver ever-changing crises and demands. For many, solace and escape have been almost impossible to find. Where once an employed young adult could schedule a vacation to get away and decompress, the lack of workers, especially in the healthcare and hospitality industries, has made scheduling vacations difficult. If they do manage to get vacation time approved, traveling presents its own challenges as COVID-19 case numbers can change protocols causing destinations to cancel plans while the current airline pilot and crew shortages may cause their flights to be cancelled. Even regular days off have become few and far between for those in jobs and careers with worker shortages. Various participants in the study had to reschedule interviews more than once because they were called in to work when someone else did not show. Without time away from work, the pressure continues to build.

Many people are choosing to cope or escape through drugs and other substances. The National Institute of Health's National Institute on Drug Abuse noted in February of this year that "researchers have observed increases in substance use and drug overdoses in the United States since the COVID-19 pandemic was declared a national emergency in March 2020."⁶ If time away from the pressures of life is exceedingly rare, and healthy options for dealing with pressure are unknown or too cumbersome to access, easily accessed options often become the default easing the pressure or pain long enough for the person to get a small break and forget the pressures for at least a moment.

The participants in the study showed an interest in deepening their faith and exploring various faith practices that could help them in their day-to-day lives. They

⁶ National Institute on Drug Abuse, "COVID-19 and Substance Use," National Institute on Drug Abuse, <https://nida.nih.gov/research-topics/comorbidity/covid-19-substance-use>.

classified themselves as Christians and are endeavoring to live their lives as faithful followers of Christ. This does not always mean, however, that they are affiliated with a church. There are opportunities for growth in this diverse community if congregations will take the time to connect with them, build a relationship, and listen to their needs. The goal, however, needs to be honoring them as children of God living to the best of their ability in the midst of all the challenges life has thrown at them. Gaining insights into their needs will provide the church unlimited possibilities for providing hope and offering ways of meeting those needs. Church members cannot do the work, studies, or devotional practices for them, but churches can provide access and direction making the pathway easier.

Input and Insights from Participants

The study showed some key elements that worked well and could be used as a guide for churches seeking to set up their own technology ministries. One of the aspects of the study which was most appreciated was that participants were able to work at their own pace and focus on their needs and interests through the multiple options. Most enjoyed the study book even when they disagreed with the author. When they read a chapter with which they disagreed, their journal entries often started with explaining why they disagreed and then delving into the subject matter clarifying what they did believe and why. This was mentioned in interviews as a moment of growth because even though they disagreed with the author, it caused them to analyze the subject so they could clearly state their own views. The devotion book was very well-received with more than one participant commenting that the authors seemed younger and more relatable. One simple

thing that was mentioned often was the joy they felt when receiving the Welcome Box with the resources and the gift of the Prayer Cross. A local congregation starting a similar ministry may want to budget for purchasing and mailing or delivering resources, a personalized welcome note, and a small, useful gift. It is a small token but reminds those participating that they are appreciated and valued by the church.

Accessibility was also a key to the success of the study. Participants mentioned the ease of using the apps which were available any time of day as well as the ability to set reminders for their use as an asset. Journaling was a joy for some who mentioned how good it felt to get their ideas down on paper and to have the freedom to write down their thoughts. Some had journaled before and were surprised at how much they had missed it. In fact, two participants asked if there were extra journals they could use since they had to turn in their journals from the study.

As successful as the study book and devotional book were for some, for others, they were not successful at all. Churches providing studies or devotions will need to try different resources and acknowledge that not every book or resource will appeal to every young adult. Offering multiple options and various learning style opportunities was very helpful and is highly recommended. The devotional apps suggested were well-received, and suggestions were made to add podcasts to the list of resources available. While it can be currently daunting for a local church (especially with limited funds) to create an app, most churches are now in a position where they could produce a podcast if desired. As more young adults become involved, it may also be possible to empower them to personally provide content and direction. It may also be wise to have multiple church

congregations work together to provide various technologies and ministries multiplying the resources available and the possibilities for connection.

One of the most common suggestions is also the most challenging – meeting in person. The project had one opportunity for an in-person meeting after multiple participants commented on how much they would like to have the personal connection. As mentioned earlier, schedules of the participants were full, so finding time when they could gather was daunting. The meet-up ended up being more of an open house type feel with people being able to come to the location between certain hours. Although there was never a large group of people together at once, some participants' visits did overlap giving them time to connect and talk with each other. More study needs to be done on how to best make this effective – especially if some participants are far away – but it will be a vital part of relationship-building with peers.

Some other suggestions from the mid-project and final interviews were:

- Offer daily reminders.
- Have a Discord page where the group could connect. Groups can have multiple channels and chats.
- Have a specific day for group members to post questions.
- It would be cool to have the group connect one or two times or even weekly; getting to meet everyone would be cool.
- It would be pretty cool for a church to do this. Maybe they could spread out to different demographics, especially with a goal of inclusivity letting LGBTQ+ and others know specifically that they are welcome. Everyone is included and welcomed.
- More accessible options and podcasts would be easier especially for non-readers. It would also be good for commuters.
- Make the apps and ways to set up formatting easier, more user-friendly.

- Expand this to include youth and other age groups.
- Setting themes throughout the year. Have one study for several weeks, then break and the start a new one. This gives people opportunities to join at various times. Offer multiple options at the same time.
- It was helpful to have the project self-guided so people could participate at their own pace and speed.

The mid-project and closing interviews indicated that many participants enjoyed the opportunity and wanted to find ways to integrate the spiritual practices and/or more studies into their daily lives. One participant mentioned how much she appreciated having hard copies of the books and journal because she could put them where she would see them, and they would remind her to take the time to read, pray, and think. One did not want the study to end. Another participant mentioned how much she appreciated my availability, flexibility, and willingness to accommodate their schedules. This point will need to be a key element as future ministries are developed. While there are elements and studies which may require members to participate at specific times, for the most part, flexibility will be necessary and will honor the other commitments and concerns vying for their time.

Study members also gained some insights into themselves and the people around them as they participated in and reflected on the study. One participant mentioned, “I was surprised how mean I was to myself for forgetting and not making it a priority.” Another mentioned she felt it was interesting to her that she didn’t make the study a priority. She said, “Life happens a lot, and I make cuts to what is seen as ‘extra’, and ‘feeding the spirit’ feels ‘extra.’” The same participant also mentioned the reality of needing to prioritize self-care practices and mentioned how getting out and away (she currently works from home) was really helpful.

Elements for Future Study

This project was helpful in exploring what technologies might work with young adults who desire to explore their faith more deeply. Future studies should continue to explore different options to see what resonates. Technology is constantly developing and changing, so it will be important for new platforms and options to be tried as they rise up and are accepted by young adults. Gaming is one platform that holds endless possibilities for researchers both in the development of games themselves, and in interacting on gaming platforms. If expanding to other generations, user accessibility will be essential. It will be important to learn which types of technology the people in the key demographic have and what they use most often.

The biggest need for future research is actively engaging people of color. This study was overwhelmingly Caucasian although multiple attempts were made to recruit and engage a diverse population for the study. As seen in the journal entries, people's life experiences inform their faith journeys as well as their day-to-day lives. While African American churches have been a foundational element in their communities for much of American history, they have been experiencing losses in this generation as well. How is this and will this reality affect communities where the churches are located, and in what ways can the churches respond to the young adults surrounding them? Dr. F. Douglas Powe, Jr. has done some groundbreaking work in this area which he examines in his book, *New Wine, New Wineskins: How African American Congregations Can Reach New Generations*. Indigenous or First Nation peoples also have stories to tell and needs for connection as do Latinx communities and other cultures that make up the United States.

While there will be similarities among the groups, I expect there will also be key differences which will influence and inform those reaching out to the young adult populations in those communities.

Final Thoughts

Although young adults' worship attendance has been falling causing great concern for Christian churches in the United States, there are young adults eager to delve more deeply into their faith and to identify what it means to be a Christian as an adult. Some have grown up in Christian church communities while others have not. Some have had positive experiences with the church while some have been traumatized. Some appreciate the church's structure and focus while some are eager for the church to move forward and become more dynamic. The good news is these young adults are out there. The concerning news is that many churches do not see them. As one study participant mentioned, "There are a lot of people who don't want to go to church but are very interested in learning about God. While talking about this project, I found six people at work who would have been willing to participate."

Many young adults have the desire to grow closer to God and to be disciples of Jesus, but in ways the traditional church does not always accept. Many young adults have felt negatively judged by the church but have not felt God sees them this way. They are looking for places where they can be their true selves and serve God. While it will take focus, energy, and adaptability on the part of the church, the young adult population still can be reached as many are searching for God and in need of the hope and strength Christianity can offer. In a world where people are often treated as less than human and

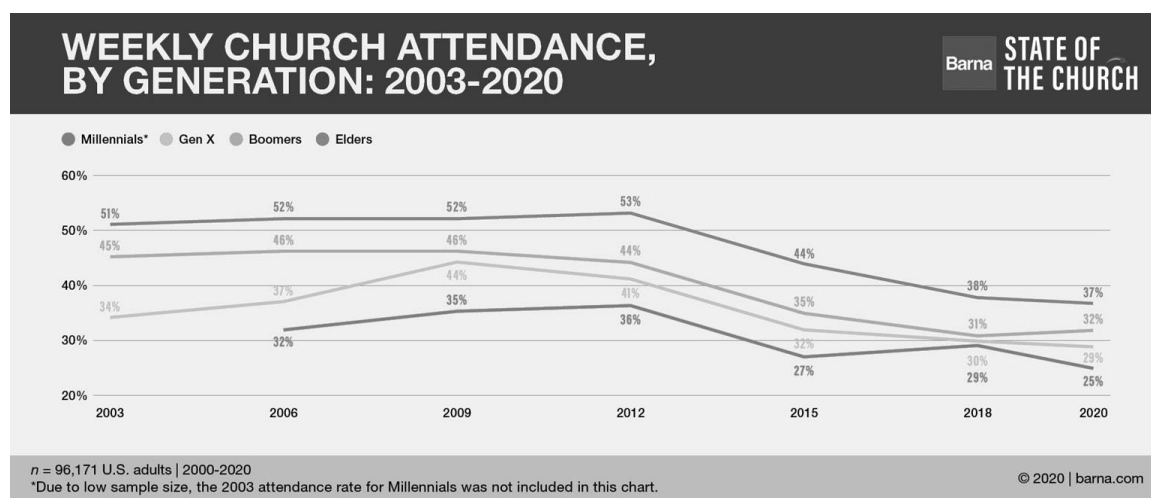
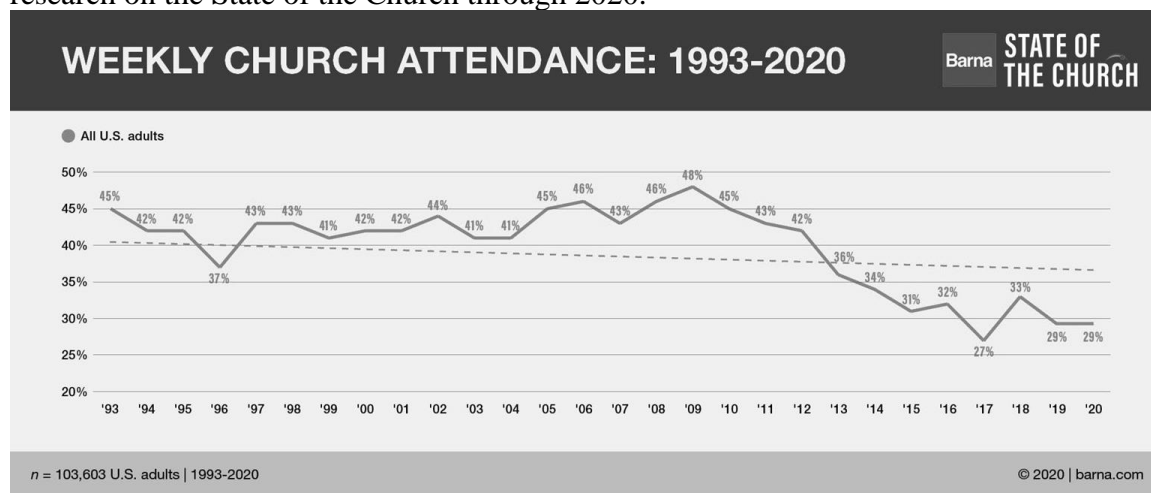
expendable by employers, the church offers a reminder that each person is a unique and valuable child of God. Each person is precious and has gifts and graces which can have a positive impact on the world around them. In this time of uncertainty, people need to know there are communities that care and are there to walk with them as they face life's challenges. One way to reach them and help them explore and build their faith and lives as disciples is using technology. This study showed that supporting, embracing, and providing technologies focused on faith development can help those who use them come to a deeper knowledge of Jesus and experience more deeply held and meaningful faith practices.

APPENDIX A

WEEKLY CHURCH ATTENDANCE AND WEEKLY CHURCH ATTENDANCE

BY GENERATION, BARNA GROUP

The following graphs show weekly church attendance results from the Barna Group's research on the State of the Church through 2020.¹



¹ Barna Group, “Signs of Decline and Hope Among Key Metrics of Faith,” *Barna: State of the Church Report* (Ventura, CA: Issachar Companies, 2020), <https://www.barna.com/research/changing-state-of-the-church/>.

APPENDIX B

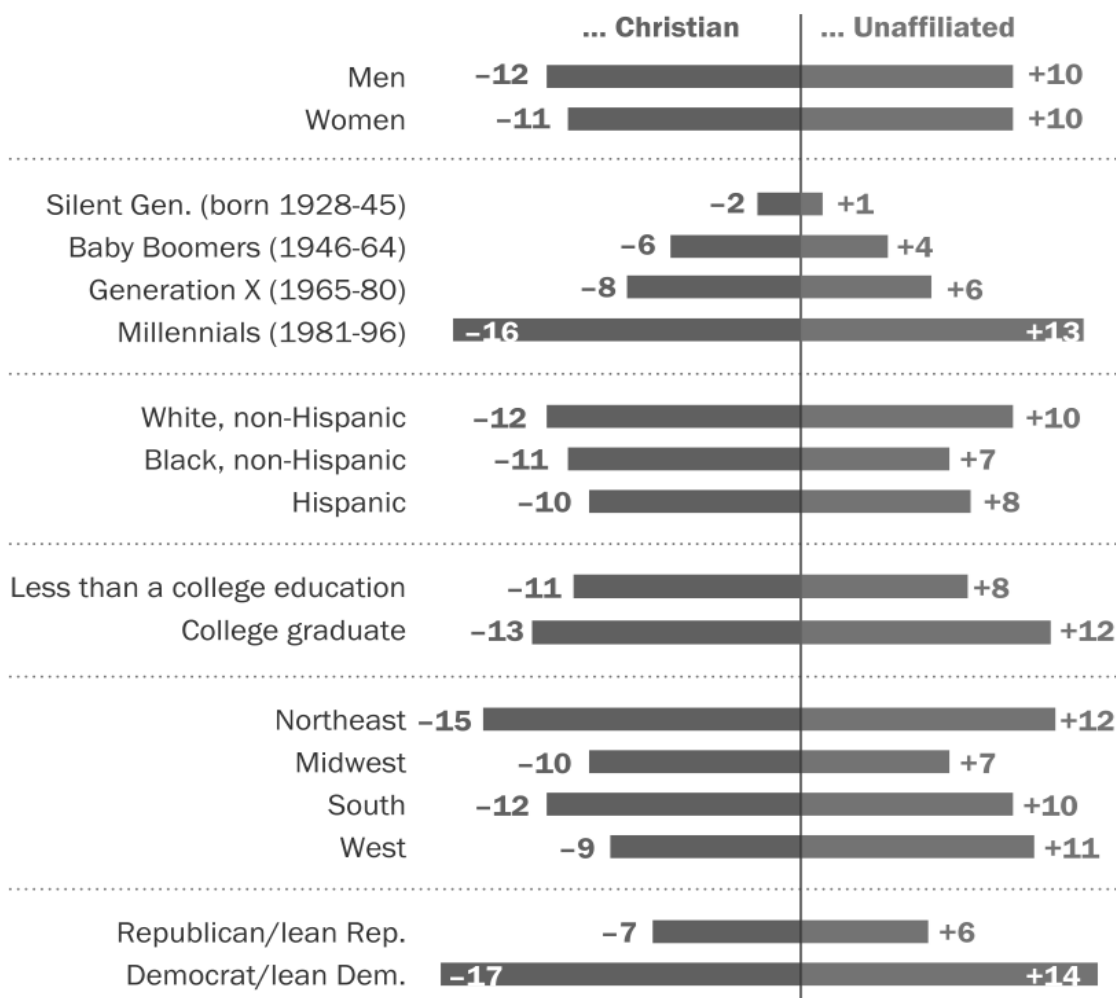
PEW RESEARCH DECLINE IN AMERICANS WHO SAY THEY ARE

CHRISTIAN

PEW RESEARCH CENTER¹

Broad-based declines in share of Americans who say they are Christian

Percentage-point change between 2009 and 2018/2019 in the share who identify as ...



Source: Aggregated Pew Research Center political surveys conducted 2009 and January 2018-July 2019 on the telephone.

"In U.S., Decline of Christianity Continues at Rapid Pace"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

¹ Pew Research Center, "In U.S., Decline of Christianity Continues at Rapid Pace," Pew Research Center, October 17, 2019, <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2019/10/17/in-u-s-decline-of-christianity-continues-at-rapid-pace/>.

APPENDIX C

TIMELINE OF EARLY UNITED STATES HISTORY

Timeline of Early United States History

United States History 1790-1840

Constitution adopted 1789

Louisiana Purchase 1803

Lewis and Clark Expedition 1806

War of 1812

Panic of 1837

Trail of Tears late 1830s

Presidents: George Washington (1789-1797)

John Adams (1797 – 1801)

Thomas Jefferson (1801 – 1809)

James Madison (1809 – 1817)

James Monroe (1817 – 1825)

John Quincy Adams (1825-1829)

Andrew Jackson (1829-1837)

Martin van Buren (1837-1841)

APPENDIX D
WELCOME EMAIL

Welcome Email

Dear

Thank you for registering for *A Faith That Lives*. Your welcome packet is on its way to you and should arrive at your home in the next few days (if you do not have it already). It contains books and other resources as well as a small gift.

I have attached the project Consent Form. Please sign, and return to me via email by April 1st.

Tomorrow, the website will be updated with more information. The tabs for each area of focus will contain more content and links for further exploration. You are welcome to use any or all during the next six weeks according to your time and interests.

You will receive a journal in your welcome packet. If you would also like to keep a digital journal for the project, please use google docs and invite me to read. This would not be anonymous. Your hard copy journal will be.

You are invited to join our Facebook page where you will be able to chat and share with each other: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/2451642508403331>

If you have any questions during the course of the project, please feel free to call or text me at [redacted] or to email me here.

I appreciate your willingness to take time to explore your faith and to help with this doctoral research.

Thank you again. I look forward to working with you!

Pastor Joyce Hoile

APPENDIX E
WELCOME PACKET

Welcome Letter

52129 Telegraph Road
Amherst, OH 44001
[phone number redacted]
March 24, 2022

Dear ,

Thank you for being a part of *A Faith That Lives*. For the next 6 weeks, you will have the opportunity to spend some time focusing on your faith and considering where God is at work in your life. I'm excited that you are part of this journey and are willing to help me in this research! Enclosed in this Welcome Packet are some resources for our time together and a small thank you gift for participating.

As explained on the website (www.godsunknownchurch.com), each week, you are asked to spend about an hour focusing on at least one of three areas of growth. You may divide that time however you wish. The three focus areas are *Exploring Christianity; Daily Prayer and Reflection; and Learning, Serving, and Growing*. I am also asking you to keep a hard copy journal and return it to me May 7 when the study ends. I have included a stamped mailing envelope for your convenience. I'll check in with you the week of April 10 to see how things are going. Questions are welcome any time. You can call or text the number above or email me. At the end of the study, you will be asked to complete an evaluation and a post-study survey. Since the purpose of this study is to see what works, what does not, and what might work if it were tweaked, please be as honest as possible.

More details about resources and timeline are attached. Again, thank you for your time. I look forward to working with you and hearing how God is at work in your life.

Rev. Joyce Hoile



A Faith That Lives: Welcome Packet

Thanks for registering! Enclosed, you will find resources to help guide and enhance our time together.

- *Exploring Christianity*

The Walk: Five Essential Practices of the Christian Life by Adam Hamilton

- From the cover jacket flap, “In *The Walk*, Adam Hamilton focuses on five essential spiritual practices that are rooted in Jesus’ own walk with God and taught throughout the New Testament. Each of these practices is a part of our daily walk with Christ and an essential part of growing together in the church.”

- *Daily Prayer and Reflection*

Good Enough: 40ish Devotionals for a Life of Imperfection by Kate Bowler and Jessica Richie

- From the cover jacket flap, “*Good Enough* grants permission to all those who need to hear that there are some things you can fix – and some things you can’t. And it’s ok that life isn’t always better . . . Bowler and Richie show how fresh imagination for truth, beauty, and meaning can be discovered amid the chaos of life.”

- *Learning, Serving, and Growing*

There is nothing specific for this in the Welcome Packet, but I hope to send something later.

- For this area of focus, we will be learning about Spirit Lake Ministry Center in North Dakota. We will be exploring their ministry, the culture of the people in the area, the church that has begun at the ministry center, and the needs of the residents.

- *Project Study Journal*

My colleague has put your username on the front page of your journal to ensure anonymity. I will not have your usernames. Please write freely in this at least once a week sharing whatever thoughts you choose. You will send the completed journal to me on May 7 in the enclosed envelope. If you would like to have the journal returned to you once my work is done, please indicate that on the front page by your username. My colleague will make that happen for you.

- *Thank You Gift*

A Prayer Cross from Bethlehem for you to use during your prayer time or as you would like.

APPENDIX F
INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Consent Form
 Doctor of Ministry United Theological Seminary
 Rooted: Church Planting and Church Revitalization in Our Diverse World
A Faith That Lives: Awakening an Active Faith Through Technology

Please review the information on the website www.godsunknownchurch.com and then review and sign this document to participate. Once it is complete, please return to Joyce Hoile at godsunknownchurch@gmail.com

I confirm that I have read and understood the information about the project as provided on the “God’s Unknown Church” website.

I confirm that I have had the opportunity to ask questions and the researcher has answered any questions about the study to my satisfaction.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the project at any time, without having to give a reason and without any consequences.

I understand that I can withdraw my data from the study at any time.

I understand that any information recorded in the investigation will remain confidential and no information that identifies me will be made publicly available.

I consent to the use of the data in research, publications, sharing, and archiving as explained on the “God’s Unknown Church” website.

I consent to being recorded in interviews as part of the project. ☐ Yes ☐ No

I agree to take part in the above study.

Name of participant _____ Date _____

Signature _____

Researcher Joyce Hoile

Date: March 24, 2022

Signature

APPENDIX G

PRE-PROJECT AND POST-PROJECT SURVEYS

Pre-Project Survey

Question 1 Do you have a religious faith?

Question 2 Are you a member of a church or faith community?

Question 3 How connected do you feel to your faith?

Question 4 How much time per week would you say you spend focusing on growing in your faith?

Question 5 Is there more you would like to know about your faith?

Question 6 Create a username

Question 7 What is your age?

Question 8 Gender

Question 9 Race/ethnicity

Question 10 Income level

Post-Project Survey

Question 1 How connected do you feel to your faith?

Question 2 How much time per week would you say you spend focusing on growing in your faith?

Question 3 Blank question

Question 4 Which study option or options did you choose?

Question 5 Did you find the study options helpful? Why or why not?

Question 6 Is there more you would like to know about your faith?

Question 7 If yes, what are some areas you would like to explore?

Question 8 Enter username

Question 9 What is your gender?

Question 10 What is your age?

APPENDIX H
MID-STUDY INTERVIEWS

Mid-Study Interviews

1. Which option or options are you using?
2. How is it/are they working for you?
3. What are some things you have discovered?

Liked?

Disliked or wished had been included?

4. You are a little over halfway through the study. What are you looking forward to in the final weeks?
5. How is journaling going?
6. What questions do you have for me?
7. Suggestions

APPENDIX I
CLOSING INTERVIEWS

Closing Interviews

1. How was the process for you?
2. Which topic or topics did you use?
3. What were the pros and cons of the project for you?
4. Did anything surprise you?
5. Suggestions for improvement? If a church were doing this, what suggestions would you have?

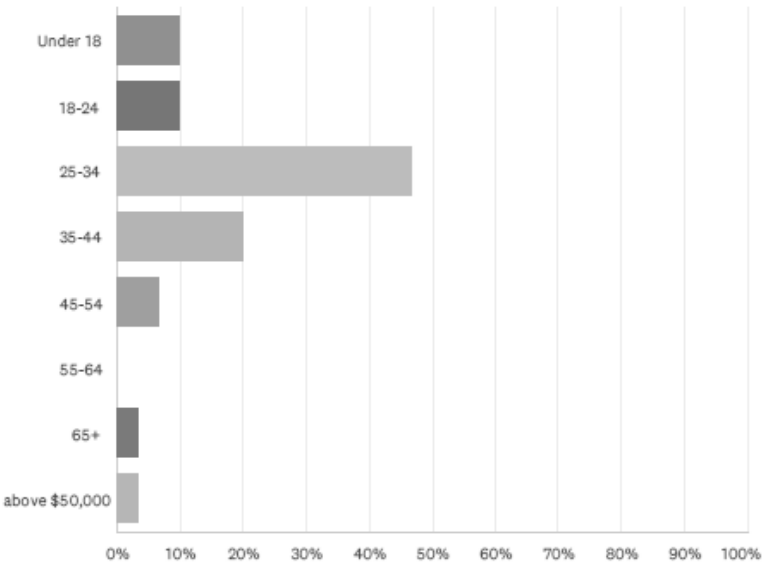
APPENDIX J

AGES OF STUDY AND SURVEY PARTICIPANTS

Pre-Project Survey: General Population

Q7 What is your age?

Answered: 30 Skipped: 3

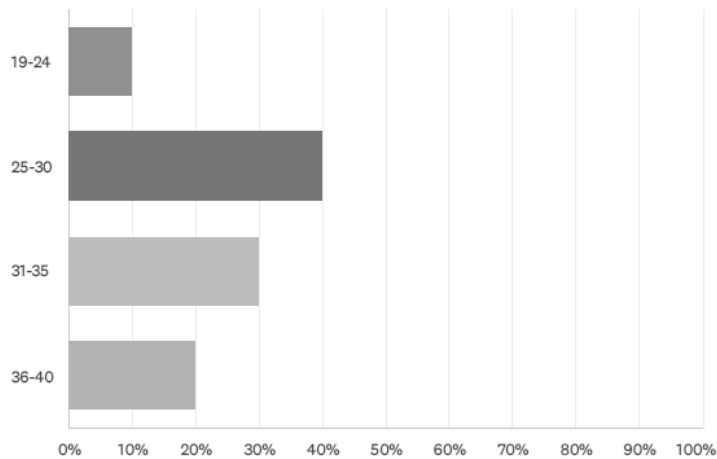


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Under 18	10.00%	3
18-24	10.00%	3
25-34	46.67%	14
35-44	20.00%	6
45-54	6.67%	2
55-64	0.00%	0
65+	3.33%	1
above \$50,000	3.33%	1
TOTAL		30

Post-Project Participant Survey

Q10 What is your age?

Answered: 10 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
19-24	10.00%	1
25-30	40.00%	4
31-35	30.00%	3
36-40	20.00%	2
TOTAL		10

Chart generated by www.surveymonkey.com

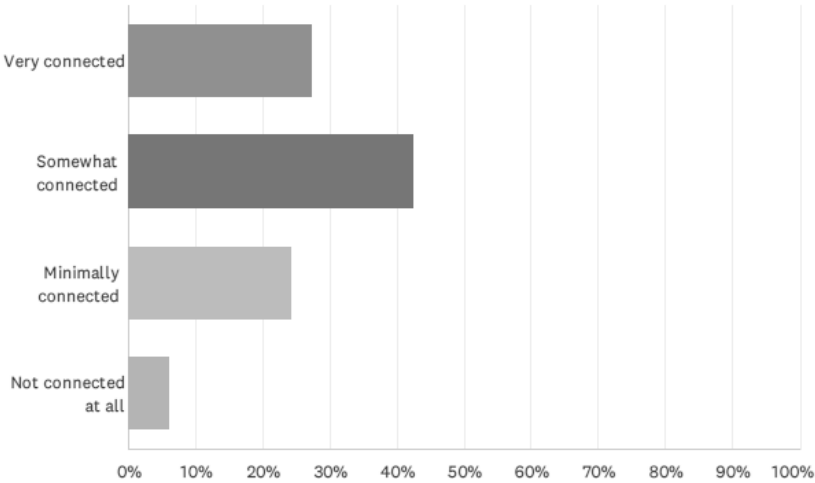
APPENDIX K

CONNECTEDNESS TO FAITH SURVEY RESULTS

Pre-Study Survey: General Population

Q3 How connected do you feel to your faith?

Answered: 33 Skipped: 0

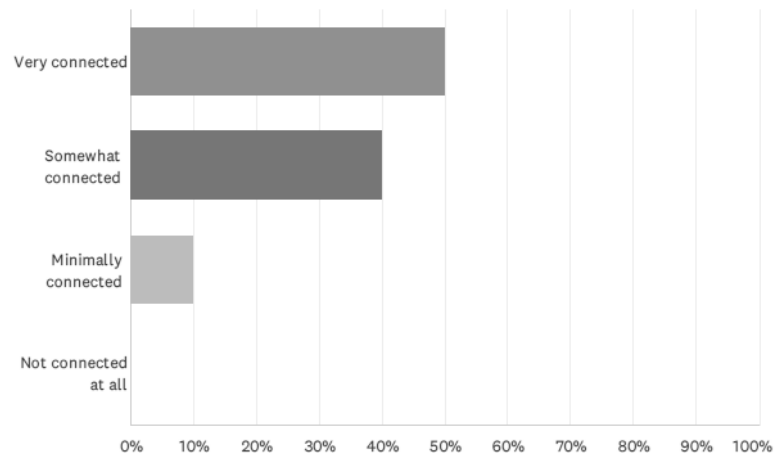


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Very connected	27.27%	9
Somewhat connected	42.42%	14
Minimally connected	24.24%	8
Not connected at all	6.06%	2
TOTAL		33

Post-Study Survey: Study Participants

Q1 How connected do you feel to your faith?

Answered: 10 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Very connected	50.00%	5
Somewhat connected	40.00%	4
Minimally connected	10.00%	1
Not connected at all	0.00%	0
TOTAL		10

Charts generated by www.surveymonkey.com

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